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# Lake water levels are back to normal - maybe

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has stated that the Lake Erie water level has returned to just above its annual average, so the low water problem that has hindered Western New York boaters for the past few seasons might not be a problem this year.



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"Buffalo is currently listed as 2.72 feet above chart datum (International Great Lakes Datum, 1985). But that can change very quickly. Winds can be a big factor in the lake's elevation," said Christine Fisher, hydrological engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Boaters can get the latest available figures by going online ([http://co-ops.nos.noaa.gov/data\\_res.html](http://co-ops.nos.noaa.gov/data_res.html)). At the end of the day, the 24 hourly lake level readings are averaged out and the mean lake level is posted. That becomes the verified figure.



Lake Erie is at its long-term average level, and 10 inches above where it was this time last year. Lake Ontario's level is 5 inches above its long-term average and is 8 inches above the level this time last year.



According to information provided by the Department of the Army, Watershed Hydrology Branch in Detroit, the expected water level should be 31 inches above the 1985 chart datum. All the Great Lakes are in their normal seasonal rises.

But keep in mind that this could change. Just last January, it was forecast by the U.S. Corps of Engineers that because of the low winter snowfall, mild winter temperatures and the absence of the normal ice cover, that evaporation would continue throughout the winter and the levels would continue to go down. But right now, it looks like water levels will not be a problem for boaters.

## Marina opens for business

Sarah Cannon, operations manager for NFTA's Small Boat Harbor on Fuhrmann Boulevard, said that the windy spring weather has inflicted some damage on the marina. The gas dock shed and the dock itself suffered the most damage and many of the trees on the property were injured.

"A lot of Lake Erie's bottom ended up in our parking lot and we had a big mess to clean up," Cannon said. The marina officially opened Wednesday with a fishing tournament to benefit the Make-A-Wish Foundation set for this

weekend.

In addition to the standard seasonal slip rentals, the marina is offering all size slips for shorter term use, too. They can be rented for daily, weekly and monthly use. That could be a handy way to see if renting a slip is better than trailering your boat.

"We have about a 90 percent seasonal occupancy again this year, just about the same as last year," Cannon said. "By offering slips for short-term use, we can take advantage of those available slips. It's something we began last year."

## Protecting from the cold

The temperature for the lake and Niagara River is hovering in the mid -40 degree range. That's about average for early spring but it's an important factor to keep in mind when heading out in your boat. Hypothermia is very dangerous and an ever-present threat for boaters, especially before the water warms to its summer swimming temperature.

It's essential to do everything you can to protect yourself and your passengers while you're out. Have a dry change of clothes for yourself and ask your guests to bring a change too - in case of a surprise dunking.

Also make it a routine part of your trip to wear your personal flotation device (PFD). It should be as automatic as buckling your seat belt when riding in a car. As well as providing flotation in case of a man-overboard situation, they can help in keeping the wearer a little warmer and to preserve body heat. Boats are few and far between early in the season so rescue assistance may not be nearby. Remember, too, that children under 12 must be wearing a PFD.

Even if you refuse to wear your life jacket while boating, at least be sure to try it on at the start of the season to be sure it fits properly. Make any necessary fitting adjustments and store it in an easily accessible compartment while it's not in use. Pull it out and have it by your side while you're aboard and moving. It can't save your life if it's tucked away somewhere where it'll stay neat and clean.

Check all flotation devices for damage from deterioration, dry-rot, cuts and abrasions they may have suffered in the offseason. If you find one that's not in good condition, get rid of it. Be sure to destroy it completely before you toss it in a trash can, to be sure no one else tries to use it.

*(Jack Weibel's Boating column will appear each Thursday through the summer.)*

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