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Despite heavy snow, Lake Superior' ' s level unchanged

Statewire

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MARQUETTE, Mich. (AP) -- Despite record-breaking snowfall in this area last winter and more than 7 inches more precipitation than usual, Lake Superior is no higher than it was last year.

According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Lake Superior' s water level was at about 601.54 feet last Thursday -- 3 inches above May' s level but the same depth as June 2001.

That level is 5 inches below the long-term monthly average for June.

Drought-like conditions in the region were blamed for low water levels last summer, which prompted the dredging of several harbors. But over the winter, snowfall totaled 319.8 inches, almost double the seasonal average of 172.2 inches.

Precipitation recorded at the National Weather Service in Negaunee so far this year has totaled 24.2 inches -- 7.54 inches above the normal 16.66 inches at this time of year.

" We had just a little above average snowfall and above average rainfall (in the Superior basin), but we' re still playing catch up, " Army Corps hydraulic engineer Carl Woodruff told the Mining Journal for a story Tuesday.

Lakes Michigan and Huron are 10 inches higher than last year and 5 inches higher than in May. They are still 10 inches below the long-term monthly average for June.

Lake Erie is 8 inches higher than last year, but an inch below May. Erie is just an inch below the long-term monthly average for June. Lake Ontario is 13 inches higher than last year, and 2 inches higher than May. Ontario is 11 inches above the long-term monthly average for June.

Woodruff said the lower lakes have been getting more precipitation in their watersheds, boosting their levels. While the Marquette County area offered greater than normal precipitation, other parts of the Lake Superior watershed did not provide as much.

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" We really need to get washed out this summer to get back to average, " Woodruff said.

Despite the higher lake levels downstream from Superior, the Lake Superior Board of Control, which controls the outflow through devices in the St. Marys River near Sault Ste. Marie, has been increasing the amount of water moving out of Superior.

Still, Woodruff said the outflow is below the level called for in the Lake Superior regulation plan.

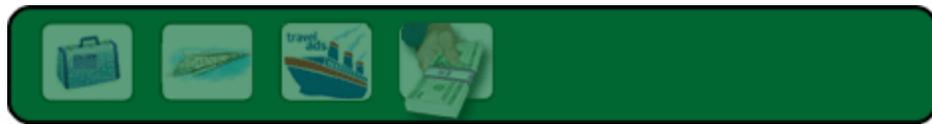
The plan calls for an outflow at Sault Ste. Marie of 2, 460 cubic meters per second. On Monday, the board limited July outflow to 2, 230 cubic meters per second.

" When we' re at low levels, we don' t want to be draining the lake too quickly, " Woodruff said.

Glen Nekvasil, spokesman for the Lake Carriers' Association, said the higher lake levels are allowing ships to carry more cargo.

" It' s still not what are vessels are capable of, but the lake levels are improving, " Nekvasil said. " We' re finding them a bit more hospitable."

Forecasters are expecting seasonal rises of Superior, Huron and Michigan to continue for the next month, with Superior rising 2 inches and Michigan and Huron rising 1 inch. Lakes Erie and Ontario are expected to drop 2 inches by the end of this month, The Mining Journal reported.



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