



US Army Corps
of Engineers

North Central Division

GREAT LAKES LEVELS UPDATE, NO. 15

3 OCTOBER 1986

The conditions for sustaining damage to the Great Lakes shoreland have worsened and become very threatening. Rainfall on the Great Lakes basin was extremely heavy during the month of September, causing extensive flooding on rivers tributary to the lakes. In central Michigan, twenty two counties were declared by President Reagan to be Federal Disaster Areas on September 19. In northeastern Illinois, the Governor has requested a Federal declaration for three counties (Lake, McHenry and Cook). With all of this rain, September has continued the trend of setting new record high monthly levels on Lakes Michigan-Huron, St. Clair and Erie. The monthly levels on these lakes were about 1/2 foot higher than the previous records for September. For Lake St. Clair, it has been over a full year now that record monthly highs have been set and for Lakes Michigan-Huron, it now has been one year straight. On a daily basis, it appeared that Lakes Michigan-Huron had reached a seasonal peak level at the end of July, at elevation 581.38 feet on July 29 through 31. However, the recent rainfall has reversed the decline so that the end of September level was about 1/4 foot higher, with a daily level of 581.62 feet. In fact, all the lakes are rising daily (except Lake Superior which is holding steady) at a time they would normally be in their seasonal decline. The Lake Erie level has been less than its record monthly high only once, in April, since October 1985. Lake Superior remains extremely high although it is not setting records at the present time. The attached bulletin shows that all the Great Lakes are predicted to remain extremely high through the end of March 1987.

The International Joint Commission (IJC) is continuing to direct the outflows for the two Great Lakes that are regulated. The Lake Superior outflow is at its specified Plan 1977 outflow setting. The Lake Ontario outflow is being regulated under an emergency action, known as Criterion (k) and provided for in the IJC's Orders of Approval. The emergency action through September has reduced the Lake Ontario level by about 2.5 feet. Shipping interests have been informed of the higher St. Lawrence River velocities and strong cross-currents created by the overdischarges dictated by the emergency action.

Preliminary work has begun on the August 1, 1986, Reference from the Governments of Canada and the United States to the IJC. The Reference, which is broad and comprehensive, requests a multi-year study of methods to alleviate the adverse consequences of fluctuating Great Lakes water levels. The Governments also asked for an interim report on measures to alleviate the present crisis by one year after the study begins and for a final report by May 1, 1989. The IJC has assigned an ad hoc committee to begin work on the interim report, which it plans to complete prior to the one year specified in the Reference. Further information on the Reference can be obtained from the IJC.

The barge is still lodged against the center pier of the Peace Bridge at the head of the Niagara River and is impeding the flow of the river by 6,000-7,000 cfs. Salvage plans could not be devised by the owners to remove the barge, so the Buffalo District, Corps of Engineers, has contracted for its removal, using an emergency authority.

The Corps of Engineers has authority under Public Law 84-99 to carry out preventive work known as Advance Measures, prior to a flood threat to life and improved property. In Michigan, construction of six approved Advance Measures projects on

which I reported previously is now substantially complete. A seventh project, the Village of Quanicassee in Tuscola County is being finalized for construction. In Ohio, seven projects have been approved. Bayview is completed, Eastlake is under construction, and Wightmans Grove is being finalized for construction. The Reno Beach/Howard Farms, Whites Landings, and Crystal Rock projects are pending resolution of local sponsorship. No projects were found to be viable in New York on Lakes Erie and Ontario. In Illinois, a project has been approved in the Edgewater Area of Chicago. In Wisconsin, one project (Carol Beach, Kenosha County) was investigated and found to be economically unjustified.

The Corps is also authorized to assist local communities in responding to actual flooding situations, to supplement maximum state and local efforts. Requests for assistance should be directed through local and state disaster assistance agencies. For Great Lakes basin technical assistance or information, please contact one of the following Corps of Engineers District Offices:

For New York, Penn. & Ohio
Colonel Daniel R. Clark
Cdr, Buffalo District
1776 Niagara Street
Buffalo, NY 14207-3199
(716) 876-5454-Ext. 2201

For Mich., Minn. & Wisc.
Colonel Robert F. Harris
Cdr, Detroit District
P.O. Box 1027
Detroit, MI 48231-1027
(313) 226-6440 or
226-6441

For Ill. & Indiana
LTC Frank R. Finch
Cdr, Chicago District
219 S. Dearborn St.
6th Floor
Chicago, IL 60604-1797
(312) 353-6400

The "Help Yourself" brochure is still available from the District Offices listed above or from this office: North Central Division, 536 South Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois 60605-1592, telephone: (312) 353-6364.

Near-shore wave warnings are provided by various National Weather Service (NWS) Offices for certain portions of the Great Lakes. Information can normally be heard on the NWS's local weather radio broadcasts. Shoreline residents should pay attention to the weather situation. If severe storm winds occur this fall or early winter, the amount of damage could be severe. With Lakes Michigan-Huron, St. Clair and Erie at record high levels we are entering a new situation wherein properties never damaged before may now be subject to damage. Shore property owners need to take steps to organize and plan now, in advance of the storm season.

I will continue to issue these updates in an effort to keep you informed of the lake levels and the actions that are being taken to help alleviate the situations as well as those you should be taking to help yourself. These updates will accompany the monthly bulletin until the lakes return to safe levels.


JOSEPH PRATT
Brigadier General, USA
Commanding