



US Army Corps
of Engineers

North Central Division

Great Lakes Levels

Update No. 31

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Beware! Although the levels have dropped significantly from the record levels of just about a year ago, the middle lakes are still significantly above average and they can still cause problems during storm events, such as the December 14-15, 1987 storm on Lake Erie. This is especially a concern with very little ice on the lakes - ice cover in the open lake areas was much less than average at the end of January because of mild winter temperatures. Lack of an ice cover means that any winter storm can cause severe damage.

Overall, January's precipitation on the Great Lakes basin was less than average. Lakes Erie and Ontario received only about half of the average amount. However, Lake Superior received significantly greater than average precipitation and Lakes Michigan-Huron received about their average amount.

The Great Lakes are either approaching or at their winter low. Lake Superior's level declined in January and is expected to continue declining for this month and next. Lakes Michigan-Huron continue to inch towards their long-term average levels. Their January mean level was about 1/2 inch closer to the long-term average than the December mean level. Again, they are expected to decline slightly this month and then begin their seasonal rise. However, they will remain 3/4 to 1 foot above average. Lake St. Clair, likewise, dropped in January after a December rise in levels. It, too, is expected to decline slightly this month before beginning its seasonal rise. After an unusual rise in December, Lake Erie's level dropped in January and is expected to decline slowly this month before beginning its seasonal rise. Lake Ontario has been holding steady during January. It is expected to remain that way this month and then begin its seasonal rise.

We're flowing a little extra water out of Lake Superior this winter to eliminate the remainder of the storage put there during the IJC's emergency regulation in 1985-86. This 30,000 cfs-months of storage on Lake Superior is being eliminated at a rate of 7,500 cfs per month and will be eliminated by the end of April.

With Lake Superior below its long-term average level, and Lakes Michigan-Huron above their long-term average level, the current minimum outflow setting favors the downstream lakes which remain high (except for Lake Ontario). The Lake Ontario level is at its long-term average and the outflows are as prescribed by Regulation Plan 1958-D. The ice cover on the St. Lawrence River is about average for this time of year. It is expected that outflows will gradually be increased, according to the Plan, under the stable ice cover.

In view of the overall improved situation, the Advanced Measures Program to construct preventive works will continue only to complete projects underway: Wightmans Grove, Ohio, on Lake Erie; Luna Pier, Michigan, on Lake Erie; and, Hampton Township on Saginaw Bay on Lake Huron.

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 Jess J. Franco, Jr
Cdr, Chicago District
219 S. Dearborn St.
6th Floor
Chicago, IL 60604-1797
(312) 353-6400

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

I want to emphasize that winter storms can be a real threat, especially when little ice exists on the lakes. Therefore, please be alert to the near-shore wave warnings that are provided by the various National Weather Service Offices for certain portions of the Great Lakes. Information can normally be heard on the National Weather Service's local weather radio broadcasts.

The Corps of Engineers' "Self Help" program of distributing sandbags, sand and plastic sheeting to flood-threatened communities is still continuing. In view of the current and predicted levels, it is our intention to continue the program only for temporary measures to be in place by this spring. Local or state disaster assistance agencies need to be contacted for materials and assistance under this program.

The IJC's Task Force Study Report for the Great Lakes Levels Reference has been completed and is currently awaiting public input. The IJC will then consider sending it to Governments for their decision on the remedial action proposals. The IJC's Great Lakes study on level fluctuations continues with the development of tasks to be accomplished by work groups under the direction of the study's Project Management Team. A background paper to the study plan for the Great Lake Levels Reference Study is available. The IJC will be reviewing possible measures, either to affect fluctuating lake levels or to modify the impacts of fluctuating levels around the Great Lakes. More information on the study is available from both the U.S. and Canadian Section Offices of the IJC: in the United States, the address is International Joint Commission, 2001 "S" Street, NW, 2nd Floor, Washington, D.C. 20440, or phone number (202) 673-6222.

These updates will continue to accompany the Monthly Bulletin until all the lakes approach long-term seasonal averages.



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Commanding