



US Army Corps
of Engineers

North Central Division

Great Lakes Levels Update No. 37 August 3, 1988

Drought continued on the upper Great Lakes in July. Again, unusually high temperatures prevailed throughout the Basin; both Lakes Superior and Michigan received about 30% below average rainfall. Precipitation improved for Lakes Ontario and Erie which received about 15% and 30%, respectively, above average rainfall in July. Preliminary reports indicate that the entire Great Lakes basin received about 10% below average rainfall in July.

The 30-day outlook from the National Weather Service for August is above average temperatures and near-average rainfall, except for Lakes Michigan-Huron, where above average total rainfall is expected.

Because of the continued drought conditions, all levels dropped except Superior's which rose a slight amount in July. Lakes

Michigan-Huron's level dropped below long-term average in July for the first time since October 1977. Lakes Superior and Ontario begin August well below average; and, Lakes Erie and St. Clair are declining towards long-term average. Lake Superior's outflow will be held at the 55,000 cfs minimum; its level is expected to hold steady. The other lakes are expected to continue dropping in level.

To put all this in perspective, the record low precipitation was a total 25.7 inches in 1930. That and the following year saw drastic drops in lake levels. The total precipitation for 1988 (through July) is about 2-1/2 inches less than the same seven months of 1930. If this trend continues, lake levels will drop significantly.

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To summarize major continuing drought impacts on navigation, Lake Superior continues near low water datum (LWD). If the precipitation trend continues, Lakes Michigan-Huron could be very near LWD before the onset of winter. The level in Montreal Harbour on the St. Lawrence River has continued to hover near LWD; its July average level was a new record low.

On boating and recreation: riparians and tourists who grew accustomed to high water in recent years may find the current near-average levels to be disadvantageous and potentially dangerous in shallow channels, inlets and tributaries recently navigable.

On beaches and lake-front activities: riparians should be enjoying better conditions with wider beaches and reduced potential for damage from storms, flooding and erosion. But a severe storm can still cause damage.

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