# Rip currents a danger in Great Lakes

**Season began Aug. 1 along 'third coast'**

**By Carol South**
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TRAVERSE CITY — Aug. 1 kicked off rip current season.

This unofficial hallmark is publicized by the Great Lakes Surf Rescue Project to raise awareness that these dangerous currents affect more than oceans.

Basic physics apply to the Great Lakes as well. Hot summer weather both warms the waters and draws people to the beach. With cooler winds arising as fall approaches, greater water friction causes waves and, ultimately, rip currents. Water displacement from storms is also a factor in creating rip currents.

Add in fewer lifeguards on duty at Great Lakes beaches and education becomes key to drowning prevention. Especially since there is a widespread belief that rip currents do not occur in the Great Lakes.

"The third coast (Great Lakes shoreline) can have ocean-force rip currents during windy weather conditions," said Dave Benjamin, of Matteson, Ill., an avid surfer on Lake Michigan. "People visiting from out of the area, they think it's a lake and you can't drown in it; they think you can't have rip currents, but you can."

Benjamin created the Great Lakes Surf Rescue Project to include a strong educational facet: the Third Coast Ocean Force Rip Current Awareness PSA Campaign. This component teaches people about rip current conditions and when to avoid swimming as well as survival tips if caught in one.

"A lot of people can be really great swimming in a pool or swimming laps but when they're 200-300 yards off shore, it's a whole different ballgame," Benjamin said.

Benjamin knows this firsthand: On Dec. 26, 2010, he almost drowned while surfing in Portage, Ind. He wiped out, the board leash came off and he was separated from his board. A current caught him and rushed him away from his companions and toward some rocks.

Benjamin started panicking as the high waves began pulling him under.

He had the presence of mind to recall an article he read on drowning, and to recognize he was in serious trouble. Benjamin realized that he simply had to float and the panic abated. He soon felt the current dissipate and he was able to backstroke away from the rocks and then swim to safety.

"If I hadn't read that article, I would have drowned," Benjamin said. "It was at that time that I thought we really need to get more awareness about rip currents and surf conditions on the Great Lakes."