LEVEL *news*

Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River Water Levels

Volume 16, Number 6 **June 5, 2008**

Levels Falling on Lakes Erie and Ontario

Lakes Erie and Ontario appear to have started their seasonal declines early again this year. Their daily water levels fell by 5 and 9 centimetres, respectively, during May instead of increasing by 6 and 8 centimetres as they have on average during the month. On the other hand, lakes Superior and Michigan-Huron continued their seasonal climbs during May. Daily water levels on lakes Superior and Michigan-Huron increased 10 and 8 centimetres, respectively, during the month.

For a complete range of probable water levels on each of the lakes over the next six months, please refer to the May 2008 edition of the Monthly Water Level Bulletin found at: **http://www.waterlevels.gc.ca/C&A/tidal_e.html**

Lakes Michigan-Huron

As indicated in the Water Level Information table attached below, Lakes Michigan-Huron began June at almost the same level as at the beginning of June last year. Given the fairly good snow cover on the upper portion of the basin last winter and the resulting inland flooding reported during the spring melt period, many people are wondering why current water level conditions on Lakes Michigan-Huron are not much higher than they were last year at this time.

Water levels on Lakes Michigan-Huron peaked early last year and, from June 9, 2007 to January 2, 2008, daily mean water levels fell 45 centimetres, or some 16 centimetres more than average. LEVEL*news* readers may recall that at the beginning of 2008, Lakes Michigan-Huron was 67 centimetres below average – 33 centimetres lower than it was at the beginning of 2007 and just 6 centimetres higher than its 1918-2007 period-of-record, beginning-of-January minimum level. The six-month forecast at that time indicated that levels on these lakes would continue to be near their record monthly lows if low

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Great Lakes Water Level Information

Lake	May 2008 Monthly Mean Level		Beginning-of-June 2008 Level	
	Compared to Monthly Average (1918-2007)	Compared to One Year Ago	Compared to Beginning-of-Month Average (1918-2007)	Compared to One Year Ago
Superior	18 cm below	32 cm above	20 cm below	33 cm above
Michigan-Huron	46 cm below	2 cm below	45 cm below	1 cm above
St. Clair	12 cm below	2 cm below	15 cm below	same
Erie	6 cm above	same	1 cm above	2 cm above
Ontario	29 cm above	25 cm above	18 cm above	21 cm above

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Canada

water supply conditions persisted into 2008.

Fortunately, Lakes Michigan-Huron have received above-average supplies so far this year due to spring rains and runoff, and levels have increased by 43 centimetres as of June 1. This larger-than-average increase has made up for most of last year's larger-than-average seasonal decline, but that's all. Therefore, although current levels on Lakes Michigan-Huron aren't any higher than they were at the same time last year, they are much better than they might have been, given their near-record low water level condition at the beginning of the year.

Lake Ontario

As indicated in the Water Level Information table, water levels on Lake Ontario are well above average for this time of year.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Ralph Moulton, Manager
Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Water Level Information Office
P.O. Box 5050
Burlington, ON L7R 4A6
Tel. (905) 336-4580
FAX: (905) 336-8901
E-mail: water.levels@ec.gc.ca
http://www.on.ec.gc.ca/greatlakes/

David Fay
Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Regulation Office
111 Water Street East
Cornwall, ON K6H 6S2
Tel. (613) 938-5725

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Editor, Chuck Southam

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May Precipitation over the Great Lakes

As a percentage of the long-term May average:

Great Lakes Basin	**100%**	**Lake Erie**	**96%**
Lake Superior	**115%**	**(including Lake St. Clair)**	
Lakes Michigan-Huron	**96%**	**Lake Ontario**	**84%**

NOTE: These figures are preliminary

Although Lake Ontario began 2008 approximately 9 centimetres *below* average, levels rose sharply this spring to as much as 35 centimetres *above* average in early May. Water levels on Lake Ontario peaked and remained at 75.34 metres for eight days in early May, but they have declined to 75.23 metres (as of June 1). Water levels are expected to continue to slowly decline in June.

A heavy snow pack and subsequent snowmelt resulted in high water supplies to Lake Ontario during the spring, driving lake levels up. Abundant snowmelt also caused near-record-high flows from the Ottawa River in April and, as a result, for much of April outflows from Lake Ontario were limited to prevent serious flooding in the Montreal area, where the Ottawa River joins the St. Lawrence. This action, by the International St. Lawrence River Board of Control, reduced Lake Ontario outflows and resulted in some 6 centimetres of water being stored on the lake relative to what the level would have been if the flows specified by the lake's current regulation plan (Plan 1958-D) had been released. As soon as the Ottawa River flows declined, the Board of Control increased the Lake Ontario outflows above those specified by the regulation plan to remove this stored water. The Lake Ontario outflows remained above those specified by Plan 1958-D through May and until June 6, when all the water that had been stored on the lake had been discharged. Lake Ontario's monthly average level was 75.30 metres in May, 7 centimetres below the upper limit specified by the International Joint Commission.

May Outflows from the Great Lakes

As a percentage of the long-term May average:

Lake Superior	**82%**	**Lake Erie**	**103%**
Lake Huron	**86%**	**Lake Ontario**	**115%**

NOTE: These figures are preliminary