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GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
LANSING



May 12, 2003

TO: Concerned Citizen

SUBJECT: Inland Lake and Great Lakes Levels

We have received many letters and telephone calls asking about the low levels on inland lakes and the Great Lakes. The purpose of this letter is to provide background information explaining how we got to this situation and why it happened.

Above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation over the last several years are causing inland lakes and the Great Lakes to approach record low levels. Three of the seven warmest years in Michigan since 1895 occurred in the past five years, including the warmest year in 1998. Over this same period, Michigan experienced its warmest and second warmest winters. Last winter was the driest on record in Michigan, depriving the Great Lakes basin of the snowpack that is needed to melt and replenish water levels in the spring. These warm and dry conditions cause the lakes to lose water at an increased rate through evaporation.

The National Weather Service shows that the Lower Peninsula is currently either abnormally dry or in a moderate drought. The long-range climate forecasts for this coming summer indicate above normal temperatures and equal chances of above or below normal precipitation. If rainfall is below normal, the Great Lakes could reach record low levels. It may take several years of above normal rainfall and normal temperatures to bring the lakes closer to their average levels.

Boaters should be aware of low water especially in the shallow areas near marinas and the inlets and outlets of lakes. Swimmers should also be extra cautious when diving into unfamiliar waters.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Detroit monitors water levels on the Great Lakes. You can read weekly updates and view the water level forecast for the next six months on their web page at www.lre.usace.army.mil.

If we can provide further information, please contact Mr. Richard C. Sorrell, P.E., Chief, Hydrologic Studies Unit, at 517-335-3176, or email to sorrell@michigan.gov.

Sincerely,

Harold R. Fitch, Chief
Geological and Land Management Division
517-241-1515