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Lake levels up sharply

Increase of four feet in Lake Michigan water levels called "historic event"

KAREN EBERT YANCEY USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

Lake Michigan water levels have risen more than four feet since January 2013, an unprecedented increase since the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began keeping records in 1918, says Thomas O'Bryan, area engineer for the US Army Corps of Engineer's Lake Michigan office.

"This is an historic event," O'Bryan said, noting that the high water levels have caused dramatic changes along the shoreline.

According to the agency's data, the lake has risen from 576.02 feet in January 2013 to 580.09 feet this May. It is still more than two feet below the record high of 582.35 set in October 1986.

Lower evaporation during the cold winter of 2014-2015 and more than average snowfall the last

two winters have contributed to the increase, said O'Bryan. In addition, higher precipitation throughout the Great Lakes Basin this spring caused the lake level to rise faster than normal, O'Bryan said.

"It was still snowing near Lake Superior last week," said O'Bryan, noting that Lake Superior was a "feeder" lake to Lake Michigan. The effects of the wet spring won't be fully evident until July, when Lake Michigan is expected to rise an additional two inches from its May levels, he said.

In Door and Kewaunee counties the effects of rising water levels have become more apparent since the snow melted this spring.

Fred Viste, park manager at Whitefish Dunes State Park, reports that the sand on the beach has been almost completely washed away by higher water and winter storms, leaving a rocky shoreline.

"It was surprising to a lot of folks when the snow melted and this is what they saw," said Viste.

Tony Jeanquart of Town and Country Realty in Kewaunee said he cur-



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Mike Krieger checks out damage to a dock at the Kewaunee Marina caused by high water levels.

rently has five listings for houses and vacant lots on the shore.

"The high water levels discourage people because they can't walk the beach," said Jeanquart "Where there are stairs down to the beach, right now their first step is often right into the water."

The greatest impact has been in the shipping

industry, allowing cargo ships back into the lake that couldn't navigate through harbors and channels for more than a decade when the water levels were low, O'Bryan said. In addition, the ships can carry heavier cargo loads..

"The whole industry is booming again," he said.

At the Brown County

Port Authority, Director Dean Haen says the high water levels have increased ships' carrying capacity.

"It's mind boggling how fast the lake has gone up," Haen said. "For every change of an inch in water levels, the ships can add or subtract a hundred tons of cargo."

The result for Green

Bay this summer may be less ships with more cargo on each ship, he said. This, in turn, reduces transportation costs.

"Companies are getting raw materials cheaper, which should translate into lower consumer prices," he said.

For smaller carriers,

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The beach at Whitefish Dunes State Park looked a lot different in May 2001, when Lake Michigan was approaching record low levels.



The sands of Whitefish Dunes in Door County have disappeared with the high water levels, leaving only rocks and seaweed.



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Algoma's Crescent Beach has a wide enough stretch of sand that it has not been as affected by higher water levels.

Lake

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like the Washington Island Ferry Line, the higher water levels have increased safety margins and eliminated worries about harbors being too shallow for boats to navigate.

"While fluctuating water levels are part of doing business on the water, it's easier to fix docks than dredging," said Hoyt Purinton, ferry line president.

For the last few years, the ferry line was dredging areas of its main island harbor to ensure its car ferries would be able to pass through to the dock, Purinton said.

This summer the ferry company has completed dredging operations and is adjusting its docks and ramps higher and longer to account for the four-foot change in water levels, he said.

The higher water levels also make it easier for most recreational boaters

to maneuver in and out of docks and harbors, although Purinton notes that submerged cedar trees and other plants that had grown up during lower water levels can be a hazard to boaters along the shoreline.

For marinas, the higher water levels bring more business.

"The higher water levels are a great thing – they mean bigger boats can get into the harbor and higher revenues for the city of Kewaunee," said Mike Krieger, assistant marina manager for the city.

While beaches may be shrinking, the weedy, smelly areas created by low water levels should be abated, says Stephen Galarneau, a spokesperson for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

The high water levels won't get rid of cladophora, which can harbor E. coli and salmonella, and creates a smell like rotten eggs, but it shouldn't exaggerate the problem as lower water levels often did, he said.

"You always have win-

ner and losers in nature when you have cyclical changes," said Kathleen Harris, naturalist for Peninsula State Park.

For example, rare fringed genetian that began growing along the beach may disappear because the native flower doesn't do well in areas with too much water, said Harris.

But higher water benefits spawning grounds for small-mouth bass and northern pike in the park's Weborg Marsh, she said.

Shoreline erosion is another downside to higher water levels. On both the Michigan and Wisconsin sides of the lake, several houses have already been condemned due to bluff erosion, the most recent in Mt. Pleasant, Wis., and New Buffalo, Mich., O'Bryan said.

Karen Ebert Yancey can be reached at kyancey@kewauneestar-news.com, on Facebook at [Kewaunee County Star News Facebook](#), on Twitter at [@EbertYancey](#) or by calling 920-559-1235.



Employment anniversaries

40 years

Jack Vanden Heuvel, Kim Counihan, KI, Bellevue; **Roger Honold, Michael Mendolla**, Green Bay Packaging.

35 years

Sharon Burkart, KI.

30 years

Linda Charniak, Mary Plonka, Aspiro, Green Bay; **Cindy Fonseca, Mark Dubord**, Brown County; **Andrea Hoffman**, Green Bay Packaging.

25 years

Tammy Villers, Clairann Leaper, Alison Evans, Aspiro, Green Bay; **Linda Harrill, Dean Haen**, Brown County; **Rick Miceli-Wink, Stacey Bix**, Brown County.

20 years

Laurie Schauer, KI; **Anne Bruss, Sherri Everson, Jodi Reetz**, Aspiro; **Lisa Koenig**, Brown County; **Dan Jelen**, Highview Custom Fabricating, Hobart; **Paul Thomson**, Green Bay Packaging.

15 years

Brian Wendt, Nathan Kollross, John Buyarski, William Bloodworth, KI; **Moui Douangphachanh**, Aspiro; **Penny Barta, Dianne Liss, Rebecca Phillips, Molly Senechal**, Brown County; **Kelly Ama**, Green Bay Packaging.

10 years

Sydney Jackson, Lisa Zietlow, Pamela Feucht, Jonathan Matta, Deanna Snell, Jason Drab, Patricia Alicea, Jodi McWilliams, Natalie Beck, KI; **Nicole Wendricks, Tony Doulet, Alyssa Denor, Ryan Lange, Nathan LaRock**, Aspiro; **Cory Tekulve**, HME Home Medical, Allouez; **Shoua Xiong**, Modern Plastics, Ashwaubenon.

5 years

Patricia Thiex, Pam Vissers, Erin Cielsewicz, Alex Kemper, Luke Bagnat, Jacob Decker, Matthew Oman, Kyla Willems, Jennifer

Smits, Christopher Breene, Aspiro; **Billi Jo Baneck, David Winters, Doug Marsh, Christopher Skorlinski, Alison Winiecki**, Brown County; **Sue Bergman**, HME Home Medical; **Daniel Cortte**, Modern Plastics; **Nicholas Jagodinski, Tommy Nasgovitz**, Green Bay Packaging.

New officers

» **Patrick Murphy** has been elected chairman of the **Crime Prevention Foundation of Brown County**. Sheriff **John Gossage** was elected vice chairman; Chief Deputy **Todd Delain**, treasurer; and **Mark Warpinski**, secretary. Other board members: Lt. **Brian Amenson, Nick Arlt**, Officer **Jedd Bradley, Tom Hinz, Nick Joseph, Travis Lipsh, Jim Murphy**, Mayor **Jim Schmitt**, Oneida Police Chief **Rich Van Boxtel**, and Capt. **Kevin Warvch**.



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PURGE BILL OF BALLAST WATER PROVISION



A freighter is silhouetted on Lake Superior in July 199 near Whitefish Point, Mich. A plan gaining support in Congress and backed by the cargo shipping industry would establish a nationwide policy for treating ballast water dumped from cargo ships into U.S. waterways. Environmental groups say that would open the door to more invasive species like zebra and quagga mussels, which have wreaked havoc from the Great Lakes to the West Coast.

A provision tucked away in the \$602 billion federal defense budget could have a big impact on the health of the Great Lakes. It's called the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act. If it's added to the U.S. Senate version of the defense bill, it would make the Great Lakes vulnerable to more aquatic invasive species.

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The act would exempt ballast water discharges from the federal Clean Water Act. The Coast Guard, which now shares oversight with the Environmental Protection Agency, would be in charge.

The Vessel Incidental Discharge Act also would prevent states from adopting new laws to restrict ballast water discharges and enforcing current laws without approval from the Coast Guard, and exempts ships that travel exclusively within the Great Lakes.

This could have a disastrous effect on the health of our Great Lakes.

Ballast water refers to the tens of millions of gallons of water that can be carried in tanks of cargo ships to make them more stable on rough seas or when their loads are light. The water, however, can carry fish, plants, bacteria and viruses that are then discharged when the ship is loaded.

It's believed that a ballast water discharge from an oceangoing ship introduced zebra mussels to the Great Lakes.

Currently, ships are required to exchange ballast water far from port in order to prevent the spread of invasive hitchhikers.

In 2013, the EPA limited the number of live organisms that could be in ballast water and required oceangoing ships to exchange their ballast water at sea. A federal appeals court last fall ordered on-board water treatment to further reduce the risk. The Vessel Incidental Discharge Act would render that ruling meaningless.

The health of our Great Lakes is at stake. Since zebra mussels first entered the Great Lakes, they have gained a foothold not only in Lake Michigan and Green Bay, but in inland lakes and the Mississippi River by hitching rides on boat hulls, anchors, docks.

They're a nuisance, not only for the swimmer who steps on their razor sharp shells, but for the native fish populations and for boaters. They attach to intake pipes and restrict the flow of water for such things as drinking water, and irrigation. They also attach to boat hulls and navigation equipment.

The provision was introduced at the behest of the cargo shipping industry, which has concerns about costs and the confusion about different laws governing it.

It's a concern we don't take lightly. Great Lakes shipping has a huge impact on our region. In north-eastern Wisconsin, we have ports in Green Bay, Manitowoc, Sturgeon Bay and Marinette. In 2010, the port of Green Bay reported an economic impact of \$83 million. The port supported 823 local jobs in 2010.

To their credit, Great Lakes shippers have supported Atlantic Ocean ballast water exchanges and

studies of invasive species.

So we understand the concern about spending millions of dollars to add on-board water treatment and dealing with different laws governing ballast water exchanges.

However, we believe the overriding principle should be to not weaken the laws already in place that have done a good job of keeping invasive species at bay.

Opening the door to more invasive species will unlikely hurt international shippers, but it will hurt those of us living next to these magnificent freshwater lakes that bring in millions of dollars in recreation and tourism and that provide drinking water for millions of residents in the Great Lakes states.

If U.S. Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., wants to simplify the laws regarding ballast water discharge, why not make tough, fair, effective environmental laws the standard instead of watered-down regulations?

Finally, we have consistently objected to adding proposals like this to unrelated bills. The defense bill has nothing to do with ballast water discharges. It's being done to offer it cover as supporters believe President Barack Obama will be reluctant to veto a defense spending bill.

If supporters want this to pass, they should have the political courage to have this bill stand on its own.

We urge our senators — Ron Johnson and Tammy Baldwin — to ensure this provision doesn't make it onto the Senate's defense bill and then to oppose adding it when the House and Senate versions are reconciled.



GUEST EDITORIAL

Keeping the lakes healthy

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This editorial was written by the Editorial Board of the Green Bay Press Gazette, part of USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin.