

2009 WATER LEVELS

Lake Superior continued what is now its longest stretch ever of water levels below Long Term Average ("LTA"). The Lake began 2009 8 inches below LTA. When it peaked in September, Superior was still 5 inches below LTA. The Lake ended 2009 4 inches below LTA.

Lake Michigan-Huron (for purposes of hydrology they are considered one body of water) began the year a foot below LTA. At its peak in July, Michigan-Huron was still 5 inches below LTA, and that's where it ended the year.

Lake Erie was actually 2 inches above LTA in January 2009 and peaked in May at 6 inches above LTA. Although Erie's level receded a bit, the Lake ended the year 1 inch above LTA.

Lake Ontario began the year 8 inches above LTA. At its peak in May, the Lake was 7 inches above LTA, but its water level then declined noticeably and Ontario ended the year 4 inches below LTA.

IMPACTS OF DREDGING CRISIS ON COMMERCIAL NAVIGATION

The vessels enrolled in LCA carry anywhere from 50 to 267 net tons of cargo for each inch of loaded draft and, when harbor and channel conditions permit, load to drafts that range from 19 to 28 feet or more. (Some of the largest vessels have loadlines that allow for drafts of 30 feet or deeper, something currently unattainable given the project depth in the connecting channels and most ports.) However, the decades-long dredging crisis has dramatically affected waterborne commerce. The table below uses select ports to illustrate how lack of dredging, coupled with fluctuations in water levels, has affected Great Lakes shipping in recent years. System-wide, it is estimated that three of every four cargos LCA members have carried in the past 5 years represent less than full loads.

COMPARISON OF LARGEST CARGOS IN VESSELS OF COMPARABLE SIZES CALENDAR YEARS 2004-2009 AND RECORD CARGO

(net tons)

PORT	COMMODITY	LARGEST CARGO						RECORD CARGO
		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	
Two Harbors, MN	Iron Ore	67,645	66,498	66,259	65,186	67,392	68,029	70,987
Escanaba, MI*	Iron Ore	65,464	64,493	66,457	65,717	67,451	70,040	76,322
Superior, WI	Coal (Head-of-Lakes)	67,531	66,735	66,429	64,504	67,799	68,541	70,903
Presque Isle, MI**	Limestone	34,557	33,239	34,623	34,442	34,442	35,457	35,457
Alpena, MI***	Cement	16,662	16,106	15,678	15,682	16,032	16,109	17,740

* The all-time record out of Escanaba is 81,033 tons in 1986, but that was a time of extremely high water and the vessel could load to 34 feet.

** 1,000-footers rarely carry limestone. The vessel used to benchmark Presque Isle, the self-unloading barge GREAT LAKES TRADER, is 740 feet long.

*** Due to the capacity of storage silos, cement moves in comparatively small cargos. The vessel used to gauge Alpena, the self-unloading barge INTEGRITY, is 460 feet long.