

2006 WATER LEVELS

Water levels on all the Great Lakes began 2006 below average. Superior started the year 4 inches below its long-term average (LTA). Even when the Lake peaked in July, it was still 8 inches below LTA. Superior then plunged and ended the year 17 inches below LTA, almost a new record low.

Lakes Michigan-Huron began 2006 18 inches below LTA, and improved but marginally, ending the year 15 inches below LTA.

Lake Erie was at LTA as the year began and ended 2006 7 inches above LTA. Lake Ontario overcame a 3-inch shortfall in January to end 2006 a foot above LTA.

IMPACTS OF DREDGING CRISIS ON COMMERCIAL NAVIGATION

LCA-registered vessels 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 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 represented less than full loads.

COMPARISON OF LARGEST CARGOS IN VESSELS OF COMPARABLE SIZES CALENDAR YEARS 2001-2006 AND 5-YEAR AVERAGE

(net tons)

PORT	COMMODITY	LARGEST CARGO						AVERAGE 2001-2005
		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
Two Harbors, MN	Iron Ore	65,981	67,118	64,860	67,645	66,498	66,259	66,421
Escanaba, MI	Iron Ore	67,878	67,643	64,244	65,464	64,493	66,457	65,945
Superior, WI	Coal (Head-of-Lakes)	64,681	67,258	64,831	67,531	66,735	66,429	66,208
Presque Isle, MI*	Limestone	34,521	33,123	30,346	34,557	33,239	34,623	33,158
Alpena, MI**	Cement	15,919	16,696	15,927	16,662	16,106	15,678	16,262

* 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.