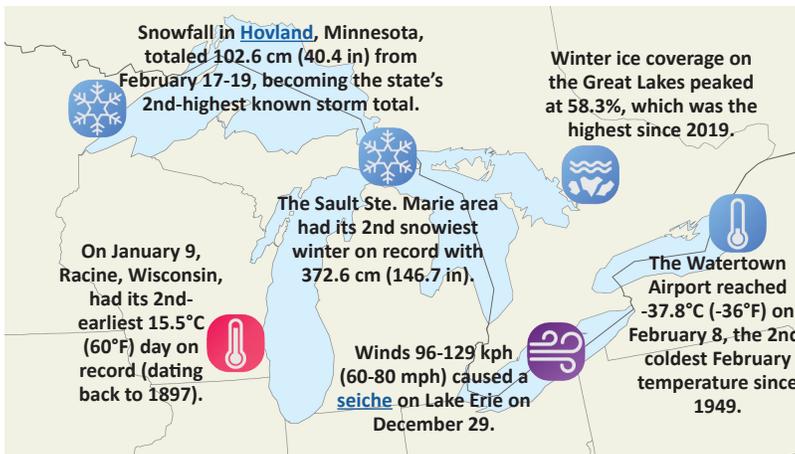


Great Lakes Significant Events – December 2025 - February 2026



A major winter storm traversed the region December 28-30, bringing blizzard conditions in the west and freezing rain and snow squalls in the east. Syracuse, New York, had its all-time snowiest day (since 1902) when 61.5 cm (24.2 in) of lake-effect snow fell on December 30.

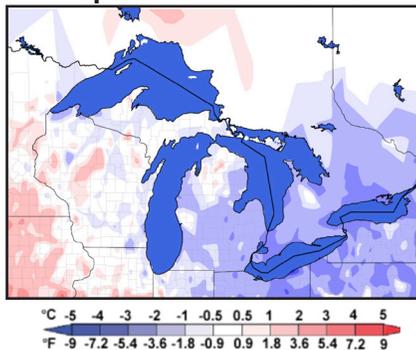
Temperatures oscillated between extreme cold and mild throughout winter. Frigid air blanketed the Great Lakes from late January into early February. Rochester, New York, had 18 consecutive days (Jan 23 to Feb 9) with low temperatures below -12°C (10°F), the second-longest such stretch since 1872. By mid-February, mild conditions were notable in the western half of the region. Houghton, Michigan,

was tied its second-longest streak of February days with above-freezing daytime temperatures (Feb 12-20).

Across northern Michigan, lake-effect snow was persistent, and many areas had their top-5 snowiest winter. Further east, January brought notable snowfall from storms and lake-effect. Toronto had nearly 90 cm (35.4 in) of snow in January. Locations across western and northern New York had a top 10 snowiest January, also fueled by an active lake-effect snow pattern. In northeast Minnesota, a blizzard dropped 50.8 to 76.2 cm (20 to 30 in) of snow from February 17-19.

Regional Climate Overview – December 2025 - February 2026

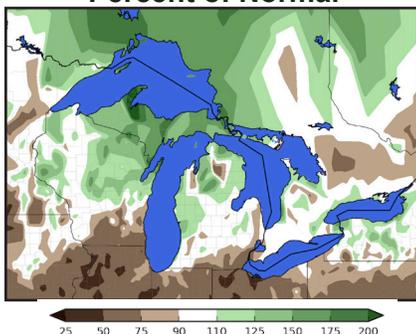
Winter Temperature Departure from Normal



Air Temperature and Precipitation

Winter air temperatures ranged from 3°C (5°F) colder than normal to near normal for most areas. December was as much as 4°C (7°F) colder than normal, particularly in the northern Huron basin. January was as much as 4°C (7°F) colder than normal, with the largest departures below normal in the southern Erie basin. February temperatures ranged from 2°C (4°F) colder than normal in the Erie and Ontario basins to 4°C (7°F) warmer than normal in the Superior basin.

Winter Precipitation Percent of Normal



Precipitation and temperature normals based on 1991-2020.

Winter precipitation ranged from 50% to 200% of normal, with high variability throughout winter. December ranged from 50% of normal precipitation in the southwestern Erie basin to over 200% of normal in the northern Superior and eastern Huron basins. January ranged from 25% of normal in the far south to over 200% of normal in the Michigan's Upper Peninsula. February precipitation ranged from less than 25% of normal in the far south to over 200% of normal in the western/southern Superior basin.

Current Water Levels

Lake	End of Feb 2026 Level Compared to:		Change in Level from beg. of Dec to end of Feb	
	Average for Feb	Feb 2025	2025-26 Change in Level	Average Change in Level
Sup.	-9 cm	+9 cm	-15 cm	-19 cm
Mich.-Huron	-29 cm	-9 cm	-7 cm	-8 cm
Erie	-16 cm	-15 cm	-3 cm	+3 cm
Ont.	-10 cm	+9 cm	+8 cm	+11 cm

End of February water levels were below average on all lakes. Michigan-Huron and Erie were below February 2025 levels, while Superior and Ontario were above. Slightly wetter winter conditions in the Superior basin led to a lower-than-average decline in water level from the beginning of December to the end of February. Erie and Ontario experienced drier winter conditions, leading to a decline in Lake Erie, which typically rises during this period. Lake Ontario rose less than average. Michigan-Huron's level had a near-average decline over the winter.

Regional Impacts – December 2025 - February 2026

Tourism and Recreation: Despite reduced seasonal snow totals, northern Wisconsin had ideal conditions for snowmobiling and cross-country skiing for most of January and February. Conditions were favorable for ice fishing in [western New York](#), Ontario, [Michigan](#), Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Ice skating on the Rideau Canal was open for about 63 days, which is about twice the average length. [Ice caves](#) off the Apostle Islands appeared for the first time in a decade.

December 28-29 Storm: Blizzard conditions [halted travel](#) across Michigan's Upper Peninsula. [Freezing rain](#) in central Ontario shutdown roadways and caused extensive power outages. Snow squalls, high winds, and drifting snow southeast of Lake Huron stranded communities from emergency services. Travel was disrupted into western New York.

Lake-Effect Snow (LES): From Dec 31 to Jan 4, up to 148.6 cm (58.5 in) of snow fell east of Lake Ontario, and up to 98.8 cm (38.9 in) fell east of Lake Erie. Snowfall rates of 7.6 to 10.2 cm (3 to 4 in) per hour made snow removal difficult and [reduced emergency services](#). From January 18-21, locations east of Lake Ontario received up to 106.7 cm (42 in) of snow, while up to 73.7 cm (29 in) fell east of Lake Erie, causing [multiple pile-ups](#) along a 9.7-km (6-mi) stretch of Interstate 90.

Greater Toronto Area Storm: A massive storm dumped about 60 cm (23.6 in) of snow on Toronto on January 25, closing schools and businesses. Local transit was inoperable, and 50-60% of flights were cancelled at Toronto's major airports. Hundreds of collisions were reported, with at least one fatality reported in Kitchener. Hamilton area [schools](#) were closed.



Apostle Islands Ice Cave
(Credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#))



Ice cover on Lake Erie on Feb 8, 2026
(Credit: [NOAA CIRA](#))



Huge snowdrifts in Silver Bay, Minnesota on Feb. 18, 2026 (Credit: [T. Weller](#))

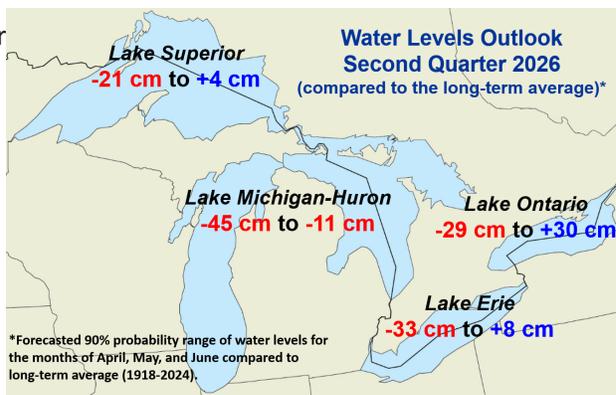
Regional Outlook – April - June 2026

Temperature and Precipitation

[Canadian](#) and [American](#) outlooks show a slight chance of above-normal temperatures along the far southern section of the basin. American outlooks have equal chances of above-, near-, or below-normal temperatures for the rest of the basin, while Canadian outlooks slightly lean toward above-normal temperatures in the far western and eastern areas. American outlooks slightly favor chances of above-normal precipitation in the eastern half of the basin and equal chances in the west. Canadian outlooks show no precipitation signal for most of the basin, with a slight chance of below-normal precipitation north of Lake Superior.

Great Lakes Water Level Outlook

The March 6-month forecast indicates that during the 2nd quarter of 2026 (April, May, June) water levels for all lakes will be in their period of seasonal rise, driven by increased rainfall and enhanced runoff from snowmelt. For Lakes Superior, Erie, and Ontario, under dry conditions, water levels are likely to remain below average; however, if conditions are wetter, there is a possibility of water levels transitioning to above average. For Lake Michigan-Huron, water levels will likely remain below average during the 2nd quarter, regardless of water supply conditions.



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