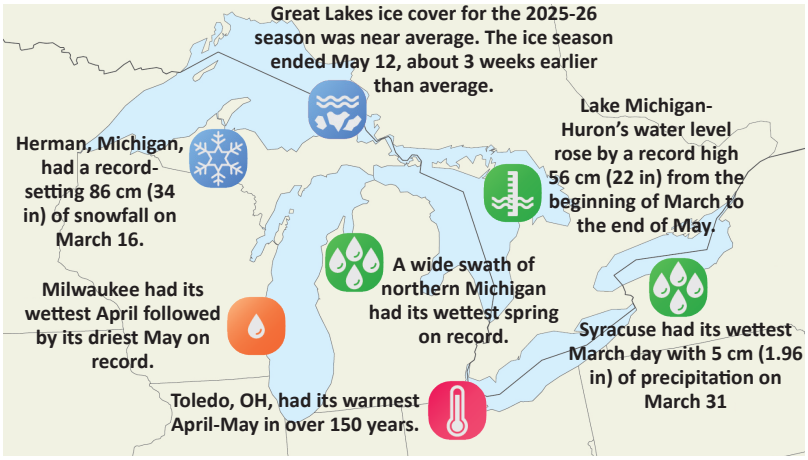
Quarterly Climate Impacts and Outlook

Great Lakes Region

June 2026

Great Lakes Significant Events – *March - May 2026*



Severe weather on March 6 led to four tornadoes across southern Michigan, resulting in 4 fatalities and 22 injuries.

A historic winter storm from March 14-17 dropped 50-66 cm (20-26 in) of snow south of Lake Superior and 30-50 cm (12-20 in) across northeast Ontario. Multiple systems traversed these areas of the central Great Lakes, resulting in near-record March snowfall totals and deep snowpack.

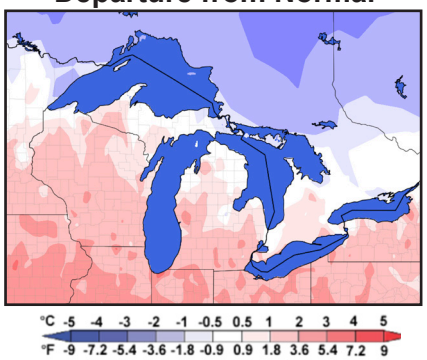
Above-normal temperatures limited snowfall across the southern portion of the basin, but persistent wetness resulted in near-record spring precipitation for Buffalo, Syracuse, and Rochester, with March particularly rainy. Cattaraugus County (NY) had three tornadoes from March 31 to April 15, which is unusual.

Conditions across the lower half of the basin were warm and wet in April. A surge of warmth and severe storms mid-month triggered rapid snowmelt across Michigan and Ontario, resulting in flooding. From April 12-14, about 50-100 mm (2 to 4 in) of precipitation fell east of the Georgian Bay, washing out roads and causing evacuations due to flooding.

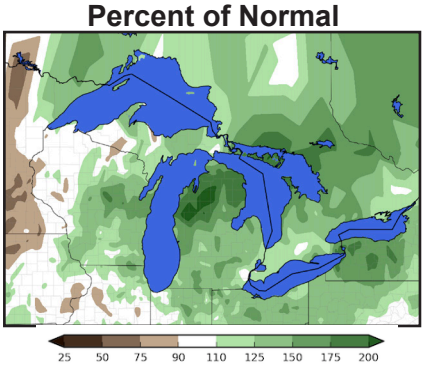
May was wet in the east and dry elsewhere, with temperatures cool to start the month and warm to end it.

Regional Climate Overview – *March - May 2026*

Spring Temperature Departure from Normal



Spring Precipitation Percent of Normal



Precipitation and temperature normals based on 1991-2020.

Air Temperature and Precipitation

Temperatures during both March and April ranged from 2°C (4°F) below normal in the northern Superior and northern Huron basins up to 5°C (9°F) above normal in the southern Michigan and southern Erie basins. May temperatures ranged from 2°C (4°F) below normal to near normal across the region. Spring temperatures ranged from 2°C (4°F) below normal to 3°C (5°F) above normal.

Precipitation during both March and April generally ranged from near normal to over 200% of normal. May precipitation ranged from less than 25% of normal in the western Michigan basin to 150% of normal in the southern Erie and southern Ontario basins. Spring precipitation ranged from near normal to over 200% of normal.

In early April, the deep snowpack around Lake Superior had over 50 cm (20 in) of liquid equivalent water, which drove flooding later in the month.

Current Water Levels

Lake	End of May 2026 Level Compared to:		Change in Level from beg. of Mar to end of May	
	Average for May	May 2025	2025-26 Change in Level	Average Change in Level
Sup.	0 cm	+12 cm	+25 cm	+17 cm
Mich.-Huron	+3 cm	+18 cm	+56 cm	+24 cm
Erie	+8 cm	-3 cm	+55 cm	+31 cm
Ont.	+33 cm	+31 cm	+86 cm	+43 cm

End of May water levels were either near or above average on all lakes. Very wet conditions this spring led to greater-than-average water level rises from the beginning of March to the end of May on all the lakes. Lake Michigan-Huron had a record-setting rise of 56 cm over the spring period (POR: 1918-2025), more than double the average rise during this time. Lake Ontario also had its 4th largest rise and Lake Erie tied its 8th largest rise from the beginning of March to the end of May.

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Regional Impacts – *March - May 2026*

Michigan and Wisconsin Flooding: Heavy rainfall over deep, saturated snowpack in April resulted in weeks of widespread flooding across lower Michigan. On April 14, a levee on the Little Black River breached, which prompted an evacuation order near Cheboygan. Across the north, flood waters washed away roads and damaged homes. Further south, the Muskegon River crested at record levels in multiple locations, including at Bridgeton, Michigan, and Newaygo, Michigan, where it reached 6 m (19.7 ft) and 5.5 m (17.9 ft), respectively, prompting evacuations and damaging infrastructure. In northeast Wisconsin, historic flooding affected the Wolf River basin.

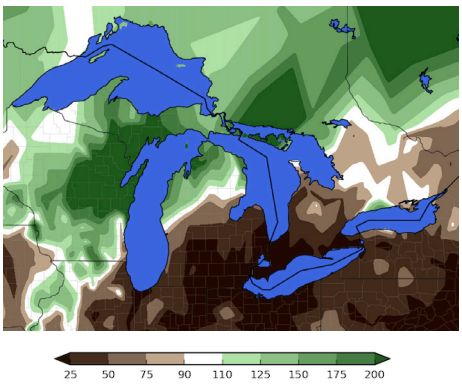
New York Flooding: Persistent and heavy springtime rain resulted in high water levels and flooding on central New York waterways. On Seneca Lake, near-record water levels, heavy waves, debris, and sinkholes along the shoreline in Geneva resulted in an estimated $3 to $4 million in damage. High water along Oneida Lake submerged docks, and waves pushed water over sea walls and into homes on the lake's east end, cutting power to some homes.

Agriculture: Early-season warming advanced crop growth, only to damage fruit trees and grapevines when a seasonal freeze occurred from April 20-22 in western and central New York. Losses were estimated at about $30 million across New York. In Michigan, which produces three-quarters of the U.S. tart cherry crop, production was down 24% from 2025 due to frost damage.

Significant snow drifts in Eben Junction, MI, in mid-March (Credit: NWS)

Flooding in Shiocton, WI on April 17, 2026 (Credit: Outagamie EM)

Spring Snowfall Percent of Normal



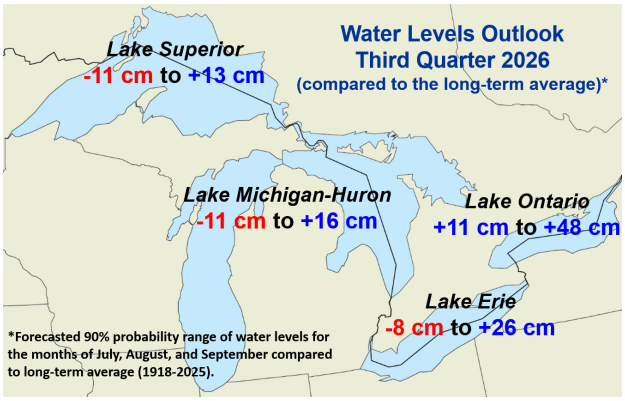
Regional Outlook – *July - September 2026*

Temperature and Precipitation

Canadian outlooks favor above-normal temperatures. However, American outlooks are not favoring warmer or cooler temperatures except the southern Lake Michigan basin, which slightly leans cooler. Canadian outlooks are not favoring wetter or drier conditions, while American outlooks show a slight chance of below-normal precipitation in the western half of the basin.

Great Lakes Water Level Outlook

The June 6-month forecast indicates that during the 3rd quarter of 2026 (Jul, Aug, Sep), Lake Superior will be finishing its seasonal rise and reaching its peak, Lake Michigan-Huron will be reaching its peak and begin seasonal decline, and Lakes Erie and Ontario will be in seasonal decline. Variation in the timing of seasonal cycles across the Lakes is typical for 3rd quarter. Lakes Superior, Michigan-Huron, and Erie could have above- or below-average levels depending if wetter or drier water supplies are received. Water levels on Lake Ontario are likely to remain above long-term average levels.



Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)

A moderate (3-5.5 severity range) western Lake Erie HAB is projected. Severity depends on total bioavailable phosphorus (TBP) from Mar 1-Jul 31. The bloom severity range reflects uncertainty in rainfall totals through July.

Partners

- Midwestern Regional Climate Center
- Environment and Climate Change Canada
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- Northeast Regional Climate Center
- Great Lakes Region State Climatologists
- NOAA
  - NCEI
  - GLERL
  - CoastWatch Great Lakes Node
  - Great Lakes and IL-IN Sea Grant Networks
  - North Central River Forecast Center
  - Ohio River Forecast Center
  - Climate Prediction Center
  - Office for Coastal Management
- GLISA
- US Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District
- NIDIS
- USDA Midwest Climate Hub

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