

Great Lakes' water level costs shippers

by UPI

CHICAGO - Thinner ice on the Great Lakes in the winter months has led to lower water levels and taken a toll on the regional economy, it was reported Sunday. The decreased ice, probably caused by increasing air and water temperatures and high winds, has hurt the shipping industry, forced lakeside power plants to extend their cooling pipes and dried up coastal wetlands, The Washington Post reported. In September, Lake Superior broke its 81-year-old low-water record by 1.6 inches, and last month it was a foot below its seasonal average, the newspaper reported. The low water levels has forced freighters that haul iron ore, steel, limestone and other raw materials to lighten their loads and change their routes to avoid running aground in shallow harbors and waterways. "They literally do load these ships by the inch," said Stuart Theis, executive director of the U.S. Great Lakes Shipping Association. Environmentalists, meanwhile, are concerned that the drying of wetlands along the shores will have serious effects on commercial and recreational fishing. "We firmly believe the changes we're seeing are impacting fisheries, possibly in a dramatic way," said Jeff Skelding of the National Wildlife Federation. "Disruption of habitat will impede fish species from being able to reproduce."

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