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DNR NEWS -- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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On the water: Is there anything we can do about water levels?

Low lake levels in many lakes around the state have prompted concern from landowners and recreational users alike.

The fact is, water levels on many Minnesota lakes fluctuate an average one to two feet each year, and sometimes even more, primarily due to precipitation. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) monitors lake levels on hundreds of lakes to help lakeshore owners understand what to expect in lake level fluctuations.

This May, according to the DNR State Climatology Office, precipitation totals were near to below average in most Minnesota communities. The exception was far northwestern Minnesota, where precipitation was above average.

But precipitation totals for the “meteorological spring” (March-April-May) were less than four inches

for much of northeastern and west central Minnesota compared to an average of five to seven inches.

In many communities, spring precipitation totals rank below the 10th percentile when compared to previous years. That means most lakes didn't get their normal 'boost' in water levels.

Temperatures for May 2010 were near the historical average across Minnesota. However, temperatures for March-April-May ranked among the warmest on record. These above-average temperatures along with the early ice out led to more water evaporating off the lakes than normal, further reducing water levels.

The U. S. Drought Monitor shows Cook and Lake counties in northeastern Minnesota are in a severe drought. Other north central and northeastern Minnesota counties are experiencing a moderate drought, and precipitation in east central Minnesota has been below-average since June 2008.

In fact, Lake Superior water levels are down seven inches from last year at this time and remain below the long-term average. Water levels on many northern and central Minnesota lakes are below average, while some larger lakes and wetlands in east central Minnesota are exceptionally low.

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Many land owners wonder if anything can be done to raise or stabilize lake levels, since fluctuating water levels can impact shoreline erosion, water accesses and facilities, septic systems, wells, structures, access roads and recreation. But changing lake water levels in response to fluctuations in weather is very difficult, costly and can create many new problems.

For example, changing lake outlet elevations can affect the biology and hydrology of the lake and water bodies downstream. It is critical to work closely with the DNR, soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), or other agencies when contemplating changes to lake outlets.

Maintaining natural vegetation in shoreline areas will assure the most stable landscape to reduce erosion and improve shoreline stability.

Everything people do on the land impacts our waters. Learn more at www.mndnr.gov.