Environment and Climate Change Canada
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OUTLOOK FOR BREAK-UP OF ICE ON THE ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY & LAKE ERIE

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Environment and Climate Change Canada

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Prepared for:

The Saint-Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation

Canada

CURRENT CONDITIONS

December saw colder than normal average temperatures over the region. Average air temperatures were near 3º C colder than normal over most areas becoming 4-5º C colder than normal east of Cornwall.

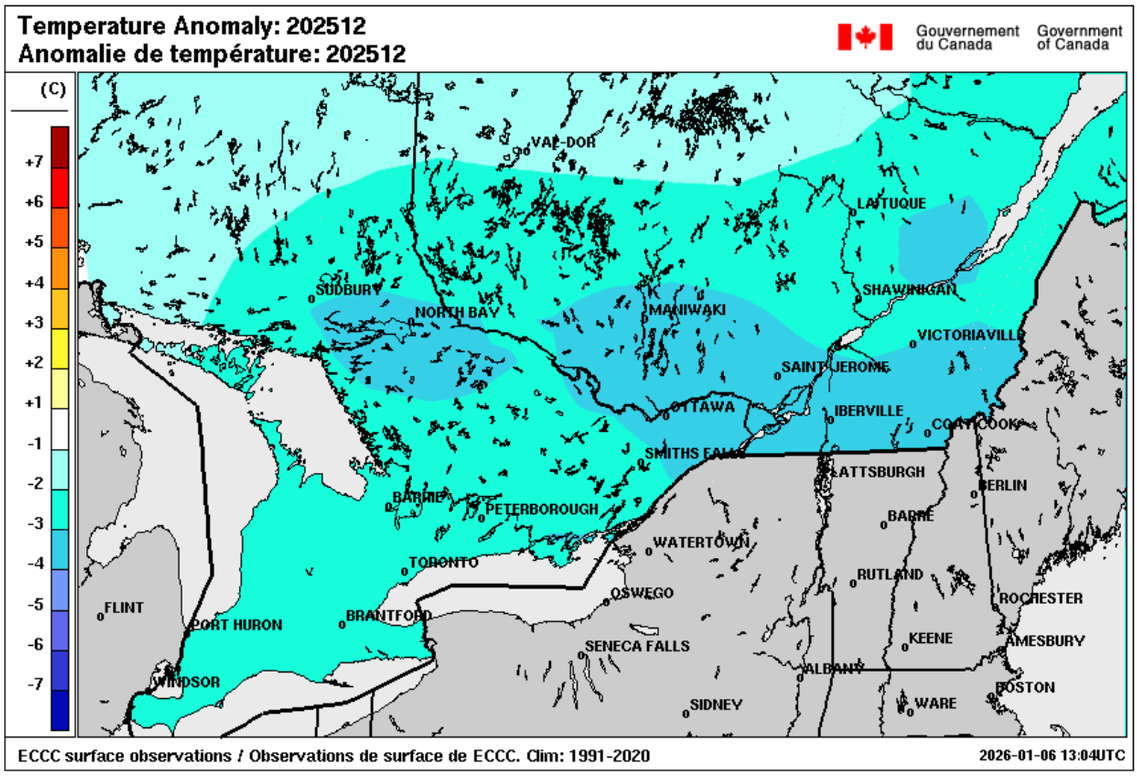

Figure 1: Temperature anomaly for December 2025. Temperatures averaged 2-3º C colder than normal values over the western Seaway while average temperatures from Cornwall to Montreal were about 4-5º C colder than is normal.

Average air temperatures in January were 2-3º C colder than normal values over the eastern Seaway while average temperatures from over Lake Erie were about 3º C colder than is normal.

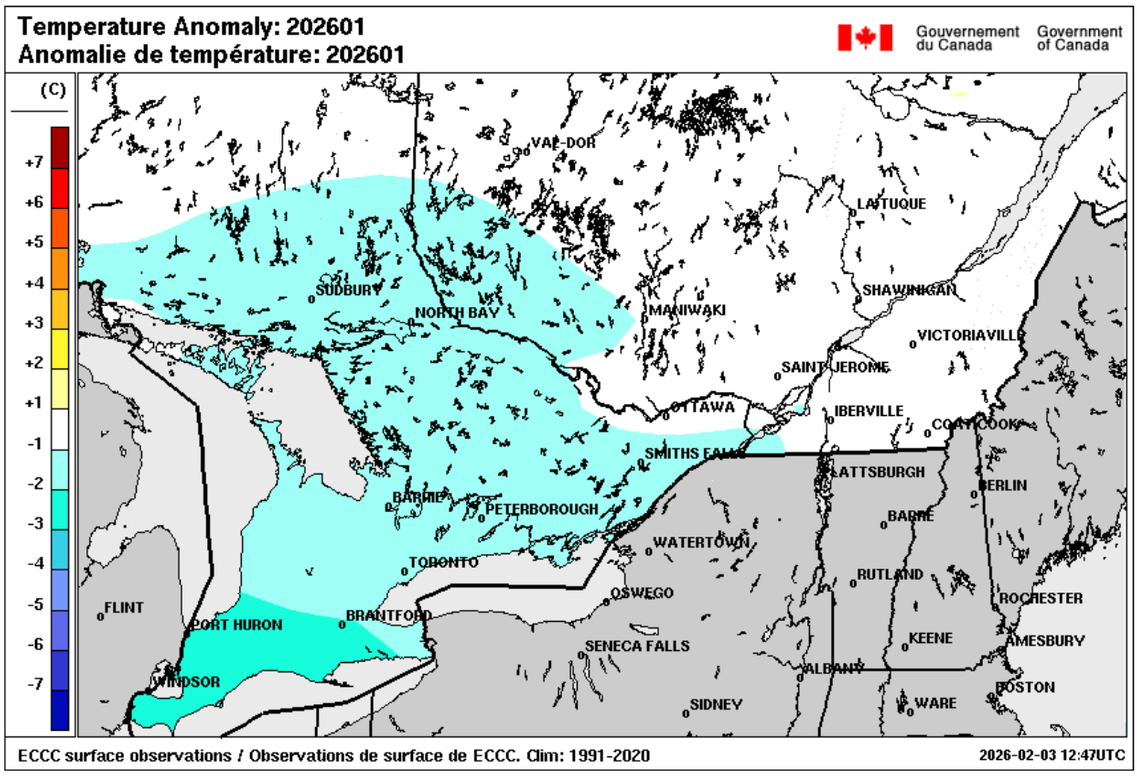

Figure 2: Temperature anomaly for January 2026. Temperatures averaged 2-3º C colder than normal values over the eastern Seaway while average temperatures from over Lake Erie were about 3º C colder than is normal.

Table 1 below shows the average temperatures at various locations along the Seaway and in western Lake Erie from December 1st ,2025 to January 31st, 2026.

All sites have experienced 2-3º C colder than normal average temperatures this winter so far.

	Temperatures Dec 1st to January 31st		
	Mean Air Temperature	Normal Mean Air Temperature	Temperature Anomaly
Montreal	**-8.5 ºC**	**-6.2 ºC**	**-2.3 ºC**
Massena	**-8.8 ºC**	**-6.0 ºC**	**-2.8 ºC**
Trenton	**-6.5 ºC**	**-4.0 ºC**	**-2.5 ºC**
Kingston	**-6.7 ºC**	**-3.9 ºC**	**-2.8 ºC**
St Catharines	**-3.4 ºC**	**-1.1 ºC**	**-2.3 ºC**
Cleveland	**-3.6 ºC**	**-0.3 ºC**	**-3.3 ºC**
Windsor	**-4.4 ºC**	**-1.6 ºC**	**-2.8 ºC**

Table 1: Winter Temperatures, Dec 1st to Jan 31st

Current Conditions

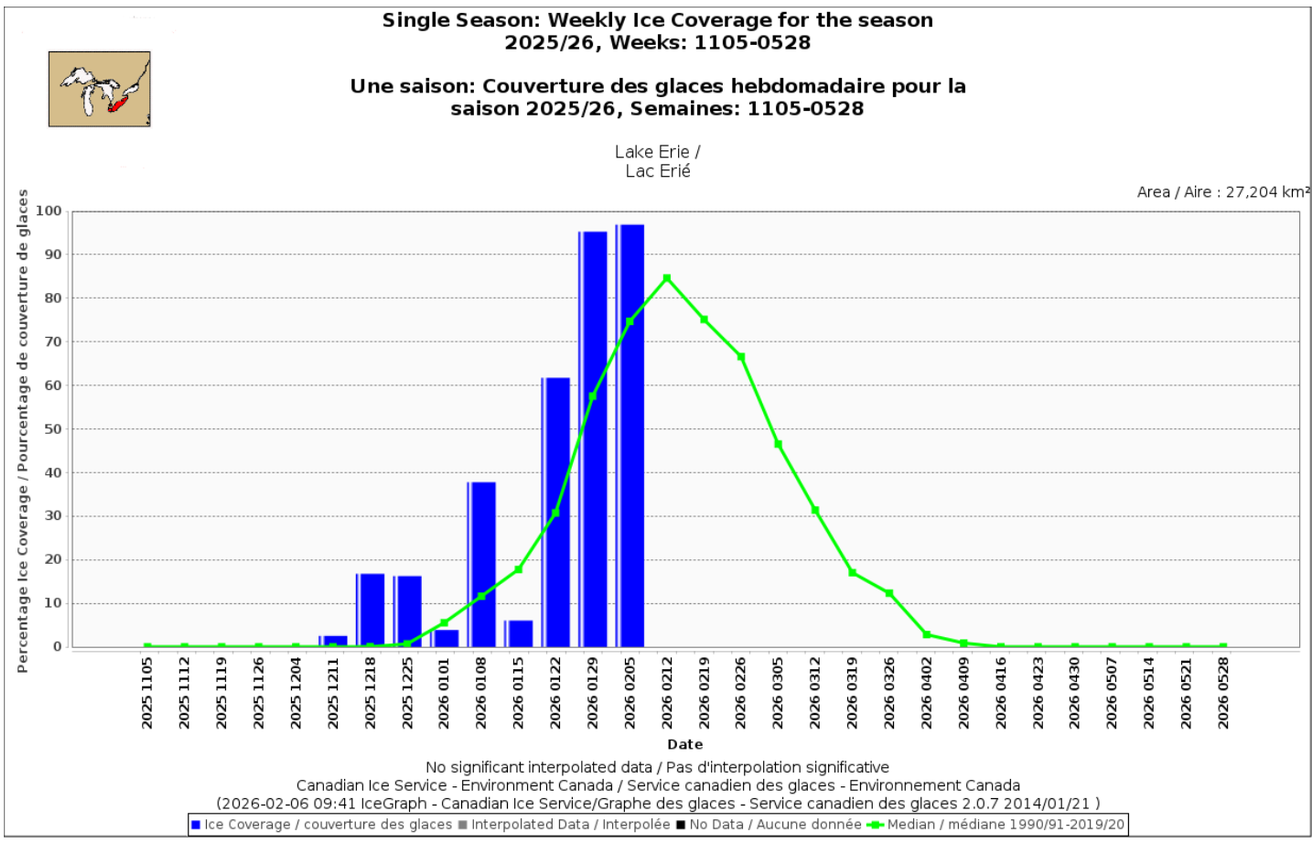

Chart 1a: Season ice coverage Lake Erie to February 5th.

The green line indicates the climatological median ice coverage over Lake Erie and this season's weekly ice coverage amounts are shown as blue bars

Currently over Lake Erie and Lake St Claire there is complete ice cover of 30-50 cm thick ice in the Western Basin and in Lake St Claire. The rest of Lake Erie is ice covered with ice between 15-30 cm thickness except 25-35 cm thick along the shores.

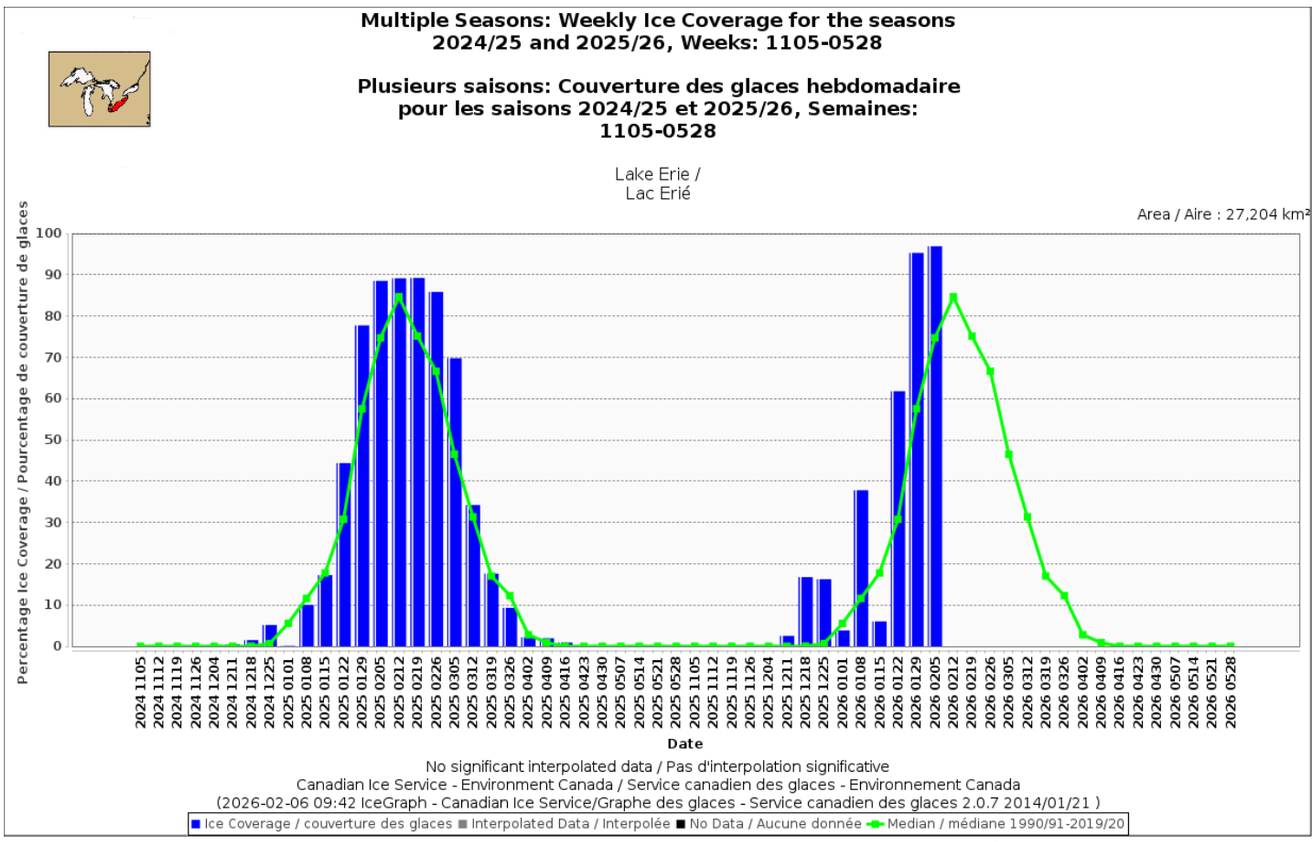

Chart 1b: This and last season ice coverage Lake Erie to February 5th.
The green line indicates the climatological median ice coverage over Lake Erie and this season's weekly ice coverage amounts are shown as blue bars

The ice cover over Lake Erie and Lake St Claire is expected to thicken in February as air temperatures are expected to be colder than normal.

The ice cover in Lake Erie and Lake St Claire will remain relatively unchanged until March. In March areas like Lake St Claire and the Western basin with ice near 50cm will see that ice start to thin and reach 30cm by mid-March and below 15 cm when fracture is possible near March 27th. The ice in Lake St Claire and the Western Basin should be mainly gone on the first week of April.

The rest of Lake Erie except for parts of the eastern shores should reach 15cm thickness near March 22-25th when fracture is likely while parts of the shores, especially the eastern shore will reach 15cm thickness probably during the first week of April. The ice cover for most of the lake will have melted near April 1st while parts of the shore and especially the eastern shore will have to wait until April 5-9th for the ice to disappear.

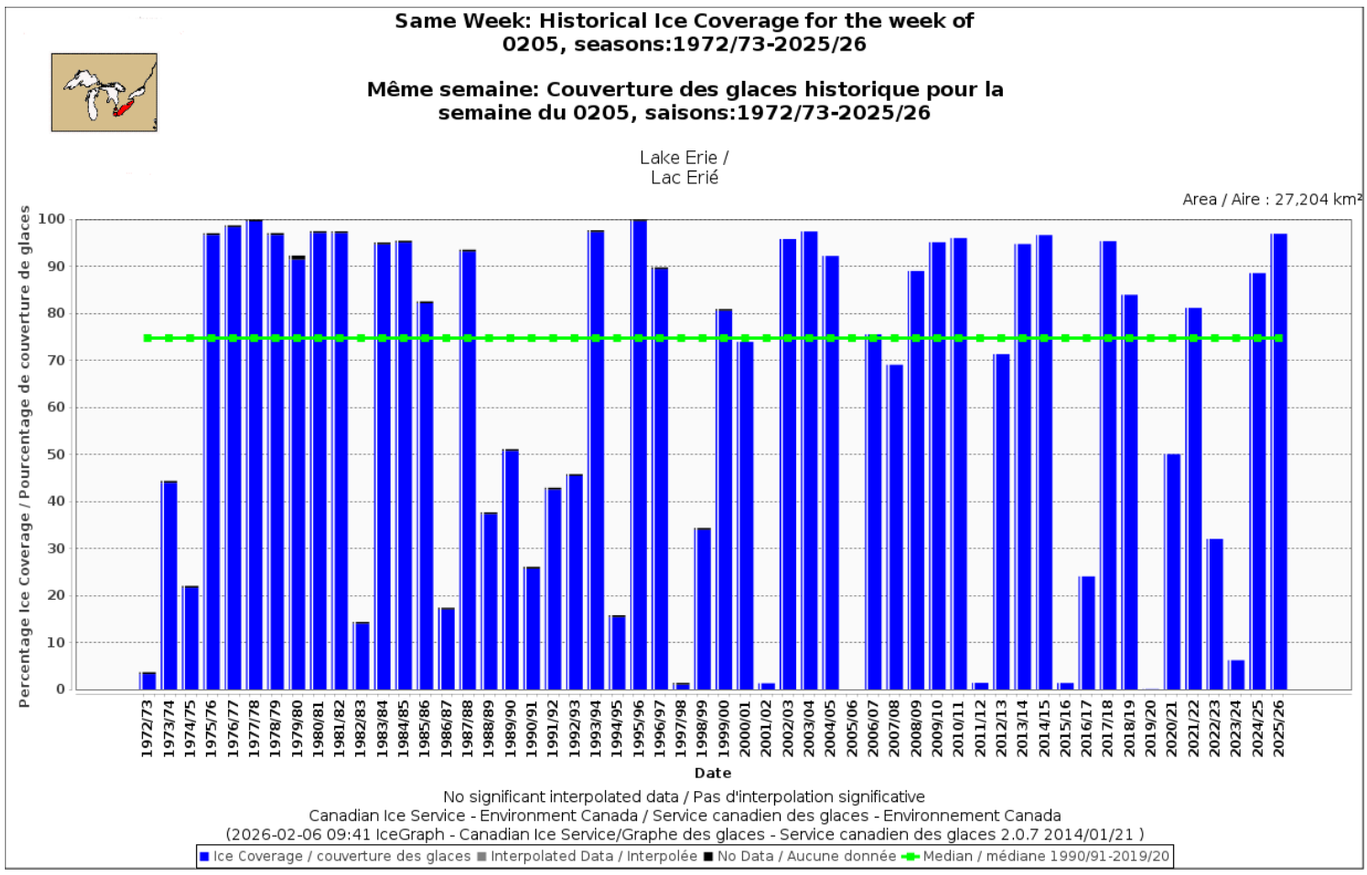

Chart 2: Historical Same Week Ice coverage for Lake Erie on January 29th.

Looking at chart 2 above can see that the average ice cover on Lake Erie is currently essentially completely ice covered and is one of the greater ice coverage years. The last season with this much ice was the 2017/18 season. This is the most ice on Lake Erie for the first week of February in a decade.

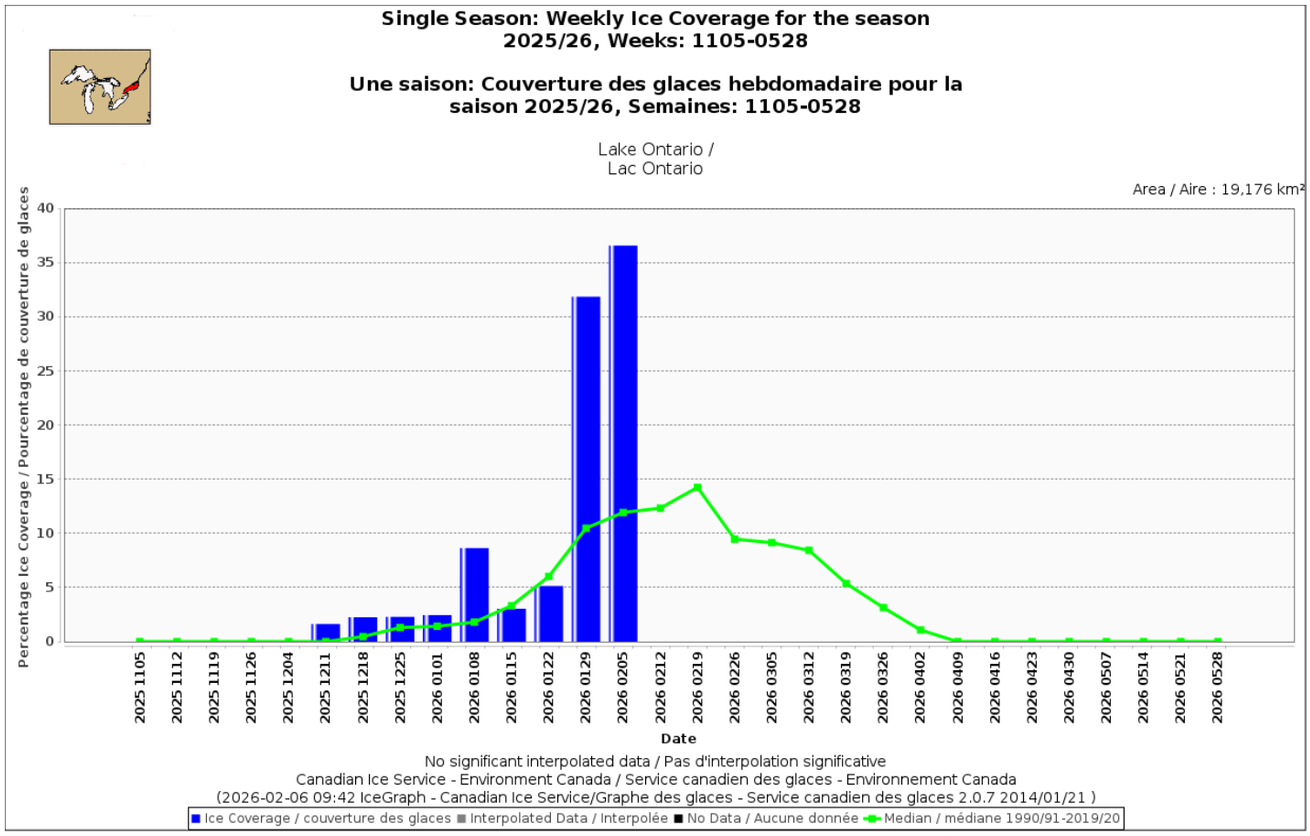

Chart 3a: Season ice coverage Lake Ontario to February 5th.

The green line indicates the climatological median ice coverage over Lake Ontario and this season's weekly ice coverage which is about three times greater than the median is shown as a blue bar.

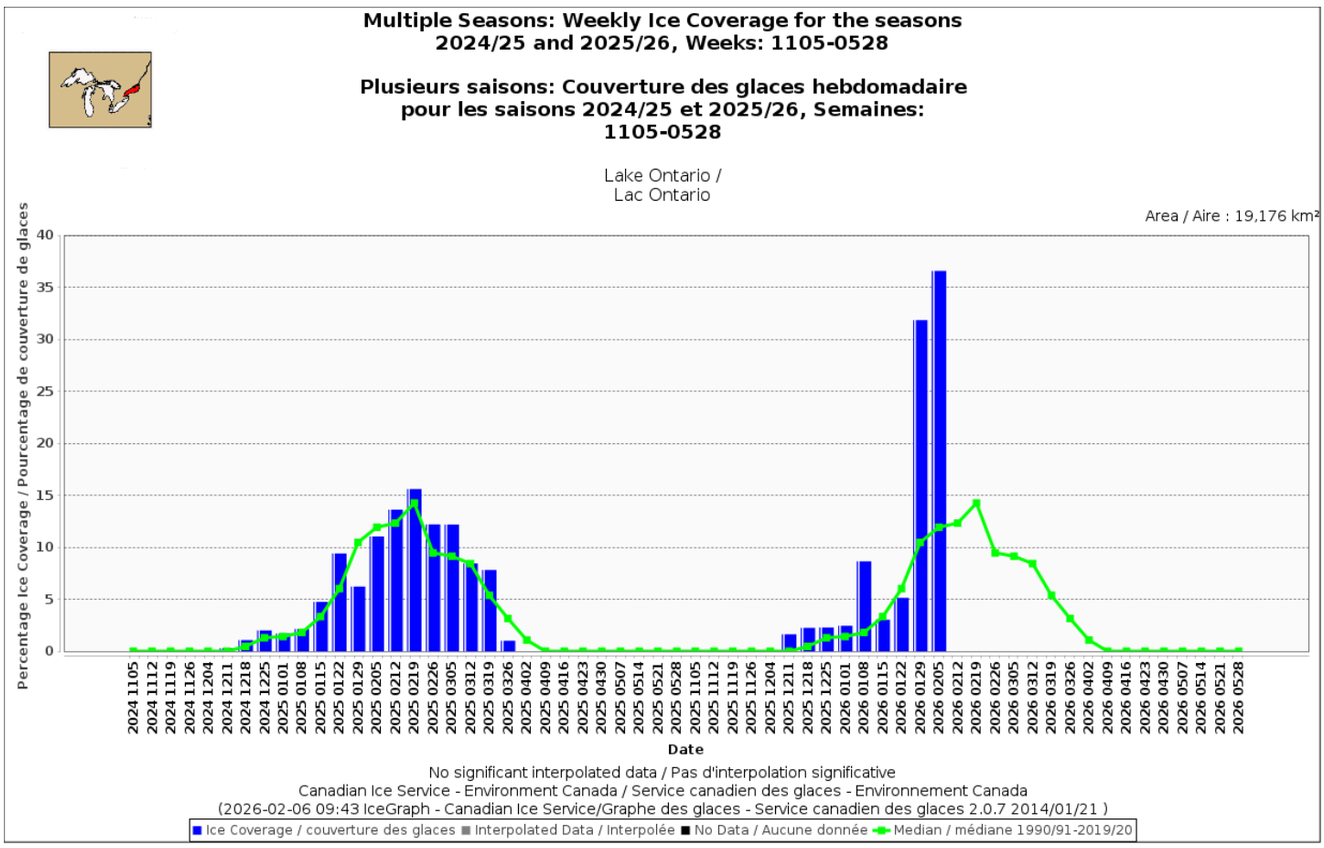

Chart 3b: This and last season ice coverage Lake Ontario to February 5th.
The green line indicates the climatological median ice coverage over Lake Ontario and this season's weekly ice coverage amounts are shown as blue bars.

Charts 3a and 3b above show just how large the ice coverage anomaly currently is on Lake Ontario. There is currently three times the amount of ice on Lake Ontario than is normal.

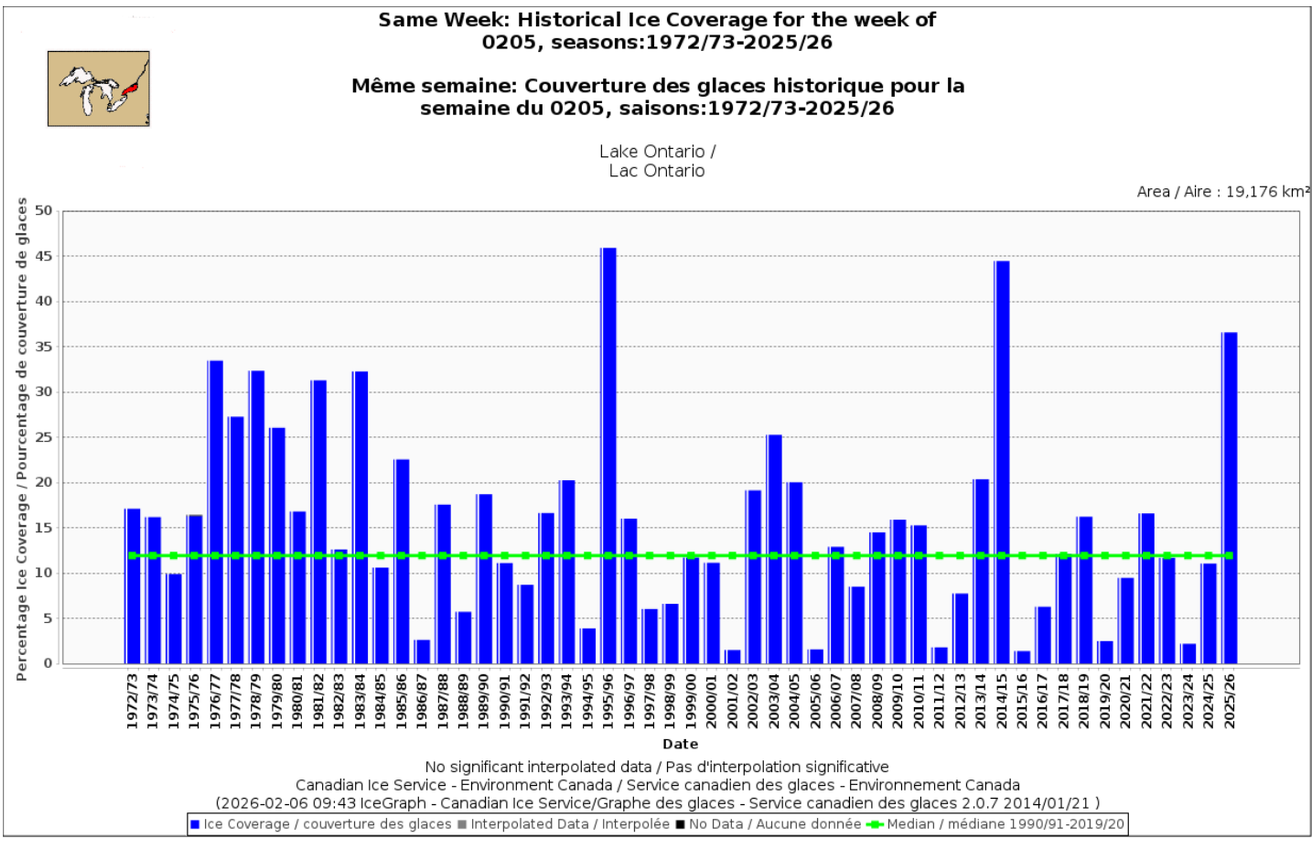

Chart 4: Historical Same Week Ice coverage for Lake Ontario on February 5th.

Looking at chart 4 above we see that the ice cover on Lake Ontario during the first week of February is 3rd most ever, the 2nd most in 30 years and 3 times more than the historical average indicated by the green horizontal line.

Currently in northeastern Lake Ontario there is medium lake ice (20-30 cm) becoming a mix of medium and thick lake ice along the shores and from Kingston eastwards (25-45cm) and in the Bay of Quinte mostly thick lake ice is present (35-60 cm). In addition, much of the shore of Lake Ontario has thin lake ice of 5-15 cm thickness. The remainder of the lake is open water.

With the forecast of colder than normal air temperatures in February expect a gradual thickening of the ice. The ice should start to thin in north-eastern Lake Ontario in late March Ice that was 30 cm should reach 15 cm and be vulnerable to fracturing during the first week of April and disappearing near April 7-12th. The thicker ice that in the Bay of Quinte and along parts of the shore from Kingston eastwards should only reach near 15 cm after the first week of April and disappear near April 14-17th.

Along the shores in western parts of Lake Ontario ice will start to fracture between March 12 to April 1st. This includes Port Weller and Colborne

The current conditions along the St Lawrence from Cornwall to Montreal is ice covered with average ice thickness between 25-35 cm with areas of the shore being 35-45 cm. With colder than normal temperatures forecast in February expect some thickening of the ice. March is forecast to have above normal air temperatures, and the ice cover is expected to start to melt quickly during this time with ice cover away from the expected to reach a15 cm the first week of April. Open water conditions are expected near April 10th.

The table below indicates the accumulated freezing degree days (FDD) this season, the historical normal accumulated FDD, the difference from this years FDD from the normal value. A negative departure in FDD indicates fewer cold days than normal while a positive value in departure in FDD indicates more cold days than normal.

Freezing degree days are corelated to the ice thickness and the corresponding ice thickness is indicated in the final column.

	Accumulated FDD	Normal accumulated FDD	FDD anomaly	Corresponding ice thickness (cm)
Montreal	**-546.0**	**-429.5**	**-116.5**	**44.2**
Massena	**-573.4**	**-416.2**	**-157.2**	**45.8**
Trenton	**-428.0**	**-297.2**	**-130.8**	**37.0**
Kingston	**-432.0**	**-294.5**	**-137.5**	**35.7**
St Catharines	**-238.0**	**-139.8**	**-98.2**	**21.1**
Cleveland	**-229.5**	**-131.3**	**-98.2**	**22.5**
Windsor	**-308.5**	**-167.4**	**-141.1**	**28.8**

Table 2: Freezing Degree Days so far this season Dec 1st, 2025, to Jan 31st, 2026

The ice thickness averages about 12-15 cm thicker this year than last season at each site due to the colder temperatures leading to between 90-120 more freezing degree days this year.

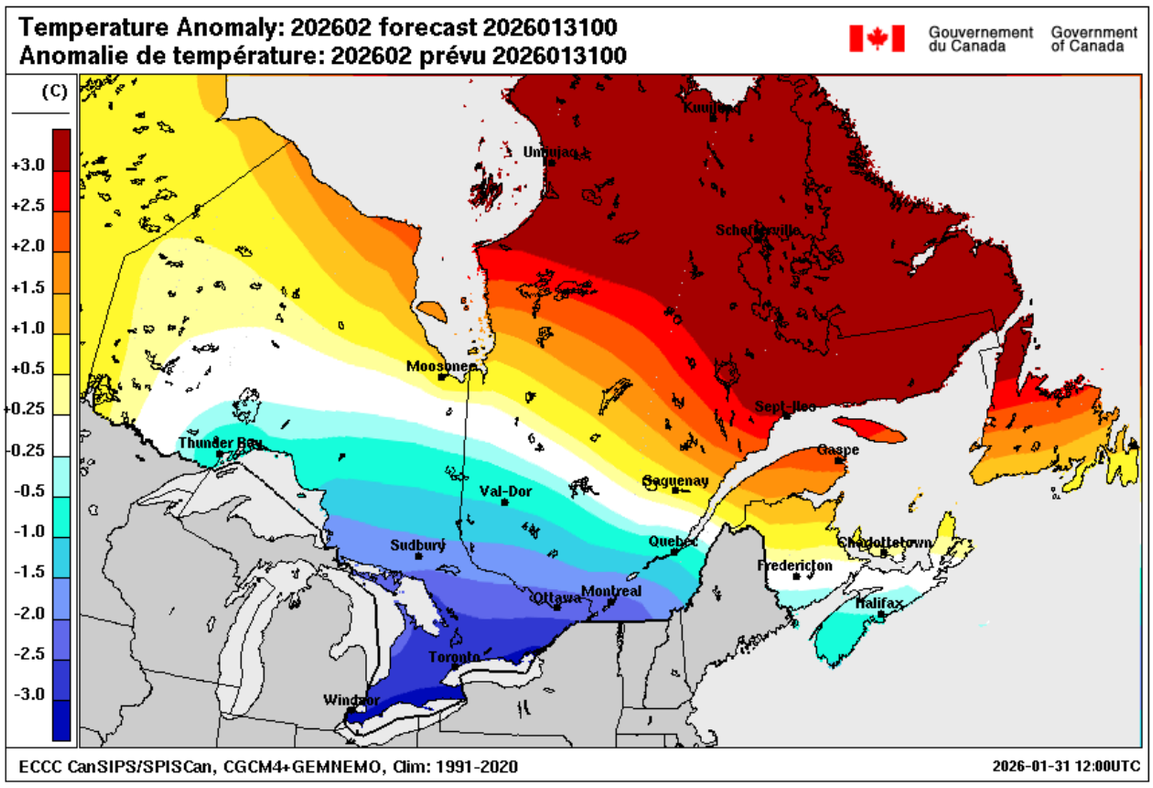

Figure 3: The average temperature for February is forecast to be about 3 °C colder than normal from Windsor to Cornwall and 2.0-2.5 °C colder than normal near Montreal.

In addition to the ice being thicker currently compared to this time last year the forecasted air temperature this year for February is 3ºC colder than normal while last year actual air temperatures in February were near normal.

The ice thickness therefore is expected to thicken a further 6-10 cm more this year given the colder temperatures in February resulting in an additional 18-22 cm thicker this year aby March 1st compared to last season.

The colder air temperatures and the thicker ice conditions will lead to a later break-up this season than last year.

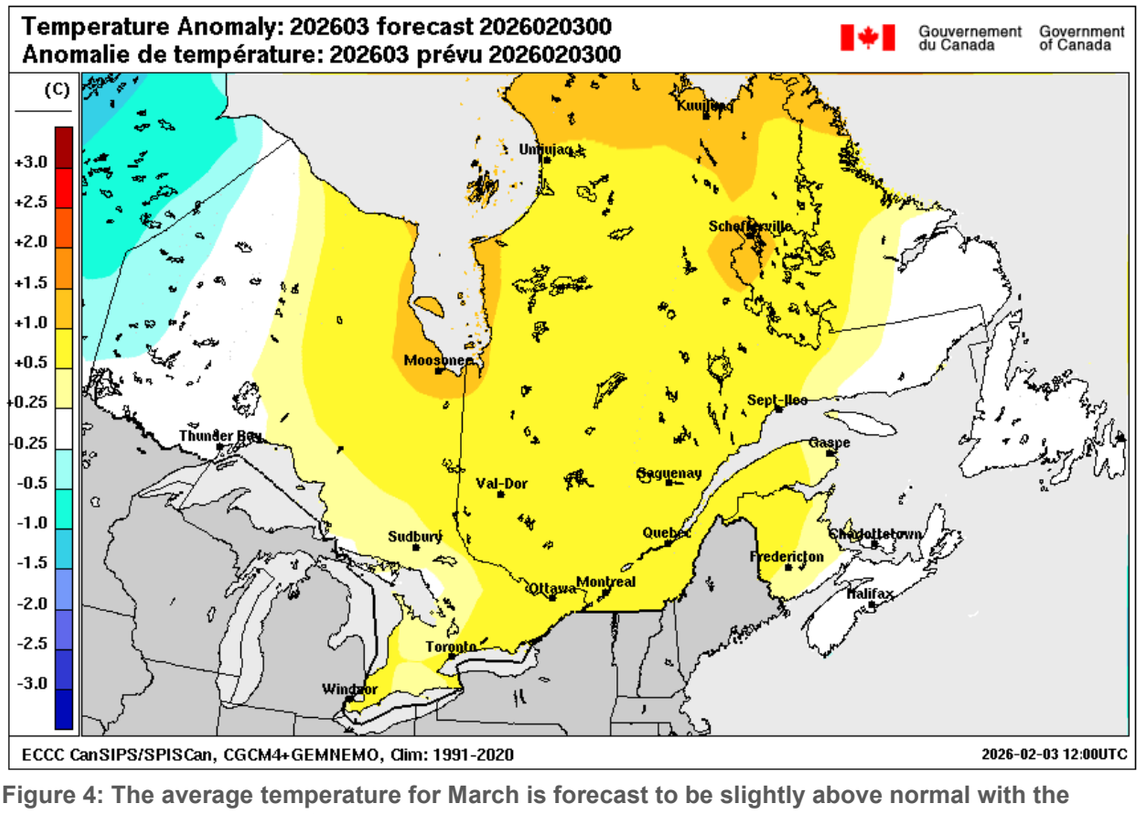

Figure 4: The average temperature for March is forecast to be slightly above normal with the above chart showing 0.5 °C warmer than normal from Windsor to near Montreal.

GENERAL OUTLOOK

Cornwall to Montreal –With colder than normal temperatures forecast in February expect some thickening of the ice. March is forecast to have above normal air temperatures, and the ice cover is expected to start to melt quickly during this time with ice cover away from the expected to reach a15 cm the first week of April. Open water conditions are expected near April 10th with local ice along shore up to a week later.

Lake Ontario to Cornwall – With the forecast of colder than normal air temperatures in February expect a gradual thickening of the ice. Lake Ontario breakup this year expected approximately 7-10 days later than 2025. The ice should start to thin in north-eastern Lake Ontario in late March Ice that was 30 cm should reach 15 cm and be vulnerable to fracturing during the first week of April and disappearing near April 7-12th. The thicker ice that in the Bay of Quinte and along parts of the shore from Kingston eastwards should only reach near 15 cm after the first week of April and disappear near April 14-17th.

Along the shores in western parts of Lake Ontario including Port Weller and Colborne ice will start to fracture between March 12 to April 1st. This includes Port Weller and Colborne.

Lake Erie – The ice cover over Lake Erie and Lake St Claire is expected to thicken in February as air temperatures are expected to be colder than normal.

The ice cover in Lake Erie and Lake St Claire will remain relatively unchanged until March. In March areas like Lake St Claire and the Western basin with ice near 50cm will see that ice start to thin and reach 30cm by mid-March and below 15 cm when fracture is possible near March 27th. The ice in Lake St Claire and the Western Basin should be mainly gone on the first week of April.

The rest of Lake Erie except for parts of the eastern shores should reach 15cm thickness near March 22-25th when fracture is likely while parts of the shores, especially the eastern shore will reach 15cm thickness probably during the first week of April.

Lake Erie breakup this year expected approximately 10–14 days later than 2025.The ice cover for most of the lake expected to melt near April 1-5th while parts of the shore and especially the eastern shore will have to wait until April 6-10th for the ice to disappear.

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