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DANIEL WEBSTER



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WEATHER

The ice is out, and the bears are getting hungry

■ The earliest-ever Ice Out on Lake Winnepesaukee has implications for more than boaters.

By John Koziol
Union Leader Correspondent

WOLFEBORO — Ice Out came earlier than ever on Lake Winnepesaukee this year, but it's not just about boating: Ben Kilham is urging homeowners to bring in their bird feeders right away or risk bears in the backyard.

With an average temperature of 28 degrees, the winter months of December through February were the warmest on record, according to the National Weather Service.

Kilham, the "Bear Whisperer of Lyme," said that means bears will be stirring earlier than usual — and they will be hungry.

Male bears, who "can travel easily and go to try to find food," will be enticed by a bird feeder, possibly creating a conflict in which "the bear gets punished," sometimes fatally.

Eric Kelsey Ph.D., a research assistant professor at Plymouth State Uni-

versity, said New Hampshire's climate is getting warmer, and there are consequences to that, though they may not be fully known or understood.

A big fan of historical data, Kelsey said Wednesday in a phone interview that he was struck by how late Ice In on Lake Winnepesaukee was announced — Feb. 9 — and how early Ice Out came — 4:47 p.m. last Sunday.

On average, Ice Out, which has been recorded since 1888, "has been occurring earlier and earlier," Kelsey said, and in recent times, there have

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JOHN KOZIOL/UNION LEADER FILE

It's been a warm winter, and now that spring is here, bears will be stirring soon and looking for easy food sources — like backyard bird feeders.



JOHN KOZIOL/UNION LEADER CORRESPONDENT

Service adviser Joe Lyons checks out the boats that will soon be coming out of storage at Goodhue Boat Co. in Wolfeboro.

Ice Out

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been two years without an Ice In.

Kelsey said that "our climate-model projections, for a good 20-plus years, have indicated that our climate will be migrating southward to what the southern U.S. had 30 to 40 years ago."

Kelsey, a skier who calls both Cannon Mountain and Tenney Mountain home, is concerned about what rising temperatures could mean for Alpine and cross-country resorts. For the third year in a row, this past December was warmer than usual, followed by heavy rains that made the snowpack wet for the end-of-year holidays.

Most New Hampshire resorts can make snow, but it costs money, Kelsey said. Some resorts may close,

he said, while the survivors may have to boost lift-ticket prices.

Kelsey is working on an archive of snowpack information, which, as of May 1, will be funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The fact is that the snowpack in New Hampshire and elsewhere is disappearing, Kelsey said. In New Hampshire, "We won't return to the climate of the last decade in our lifetime."

"The odds are increasingly against us for getting a colder or normal winter," he said.

At Wolfeboro's Goodhue Boat Co., the oldest marina on Lake Winnepesaukee, General Manager Jeremiah

Burke said Ice Out is a "very significant" annual occasion, but maybe not as much — or in the way — some think it is.

"It's significant in that it certainly gets people thinking about boating, shopping for boats, looking and actually doing a test drive," he said, but it is not actually the moment when most people choose to put their boats in the water. Most people, he said, put their boats in during the first week of May.

"The one thing that everyone needs to remember is that the water is still very cold and generally speaking the air temperatures are very cold, especially at night," he said.

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