

# Historic Ice-Out Of Winnepesaukee Expected

BY RAY CARBONE



Ice on the shore of Lake Winnepesaukee

*Credit Rimager via Flickr Creative Commons*

The man who officially declares the annual ice-out of Lake Winnepesaukee says this year's announcement could be a record-setter.

Dave Emerson of [Emerson Aviation](#) in Gilford said this winter's cold and snow may mean it's early May before he can declare what some consider the official start of the New Hampshire summer season.

"To have this much snow, and as cold as it's been," he reflected. "I've had some Old Timers tell me that the way it's been – with zero degrees in late March, and three feet of snow on the ground over the winter – they've never seen anything like that before.

"My prediction is that ice-out will be the first week of May," Emerson said. "That won't beat the record, which is May 12, 1888, but it will be up there."

Ice-out typically occurs around April 21 with the earliest ever seen just two years ago on March 23, 2012. If this year's occurrence is in early May it will be among the five latest dates on record.



Passengers on the deck of the M/S Mt. Washington on Lake Winnepesaukee

*Credit Henry Zbyszynski via Flickr CC*

As many people know, ice-out occurs when all five ports used by the cruise ship [M/S Mount Washington](#) – Weirs Beach, Meredith, Center Harbor, Alton Bay and Wolfeboro – are pronounced cleared of winter ice. Since Emerson is in the air several times a week teaching flight lessons, he easily tracks how the melt of New Hampshire’s largest lake is progressing.

“We have a near-record thickness of the ice right now,” he said. “My spotters – the ice-fishermen, mostly – tell me that they’ve been drilling through about three feet of ice. Normally this time of year it’s maybe 24-to-30 inches. The worst I’ve heard was on Alton Bay two weeks ago when it was 38-inches thick. Throughout the lake this year I’ve been hearing 36 inches is the norm.”

Now that the open-water salmon fishing season has begun, ice fishing is suspended and the seasonal bob houses have disappeared from Winnepesaukee. So Emerson relies on his other spotters – mostly homeowners with lakeside property – as well as his own sky view to determine the timing of the ice break-up.

When he sees swatches of blue water and the white snow-ice lake cover starting to fade, ice-out is close. “We’ve got to have some open water, then some wind and some sunny days,” Emerson said. “When the ice is dark, it’s thinner and it will melt faster. And you’ve got to have some melt already or otherwise, during the day, the sun reflects heat off the lake more than it absorbs.”

There have been some balmy days this week but Emerson doesn’t see any reason to alter his prediction. “I saw some places that opened up last (Thursday) night – in Saunders Bay near Governor’s Island – but it was refrozen today. If the open water is freezing, then you know the established ice is not going to be melting.

“If nothing changes, if we continue to have these types of weather patterns – not a lot of rain and cold nights – things aren’t going to change. Even this weekend, the forecast is for freezing rain –that’s ‘freezing’. That’s not melting.”

*Ray Carbone is a Lakes Region writer and editor who keeps a local blog called the [Lakes Region of New Hampshire](#)*