

U.S. National Ice Center

PRESS RELEASE

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Great Lakes Experiences Rapid Early Winter Ice Growth Followed by a Late-December Thaw

29DEC2025, SUITLAND, MD — The U.S. National Ice Center (USNIC) has been tracking the fast start to the Great Lakes ice season. USNIC and the Canadian Ice Service began the annual production of joint Great Lakes daily ice charts on 29 November 2025, following observations of ice formation in Black Bay (Lake Superior). Colder than normal temperatures were experienced through the first two weeks of December which led to unseasonably high ice coverage across the Great Lakes.

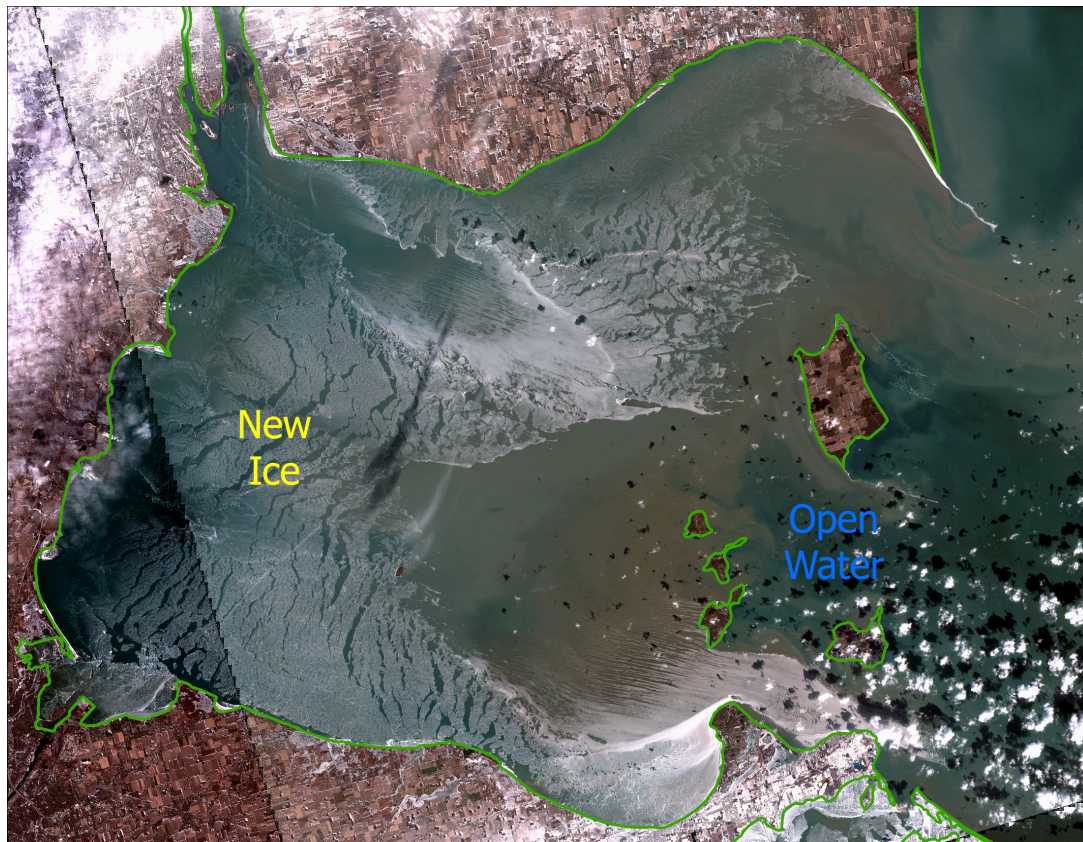


Figure 1: Sentinel-2 image of newly formed ice in the western basin of Lake Erie on 14 December 2025.

Great Lakes ice coverage was nearly 6% on 16 December. For comparison, the same date last year saw only approximately 1.5% ice cover. However, ice growth has stagnated in the last week as a warmer air mass moved into the Great Lakes region. Ice cover has fallen to below 5% as of 28 December. Despite this recent thaw, ice cover on the Lakes is still greater than last year.

Accurate and timely information on Great Lakes ice conditions is critical for both maritime safety and for the effective movement of cargo across the Lakes. The primary users of USNIC's Great Lakes products are the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and the commercial interests that USCG icebreakers assist throughout the winter. These relationships, along with the accurate environmental intelligence are crucially important for the United States economy^{1,2}. To access USNIC's standard Great Lakes Products, visit: <https://usicecenter.gov/Products/GreatLakesHome>.

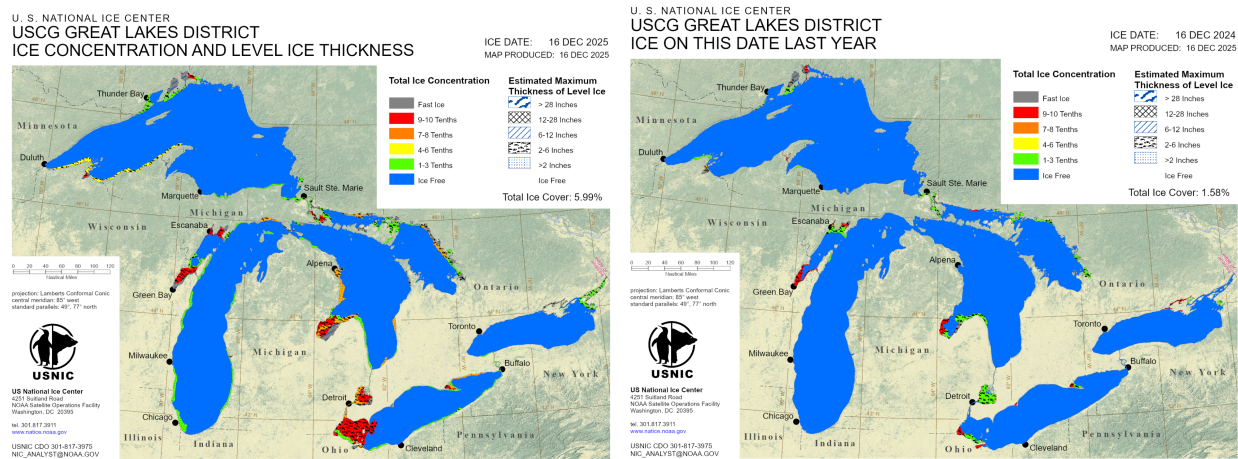


Figure 2: Comparison of Great Lakes ice cover on 16 December 2025 and 16 December 2024.

The USNIC, in collaboration with its global partners, empowers mariners and Naval forces operating in polar, subpolar, and Great Lakes regions with authoritative and timely snow, sea- and lake-ice products and forecasts. USNIC safeguards life and property at sea, defends access and commerce, and further enhances Naval maneuver and superiority. To access daily products, weekly products, archival data and much more of USNIC data in various formats, visit the USNIC webpage at: <https://usicecenter.gov/Products>.

¹<https://lcaships.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Icebreaking-FAQs-.pdf>

²<https://lcaships.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Great-Lakes-Winter-Commerce-Act.pdf>

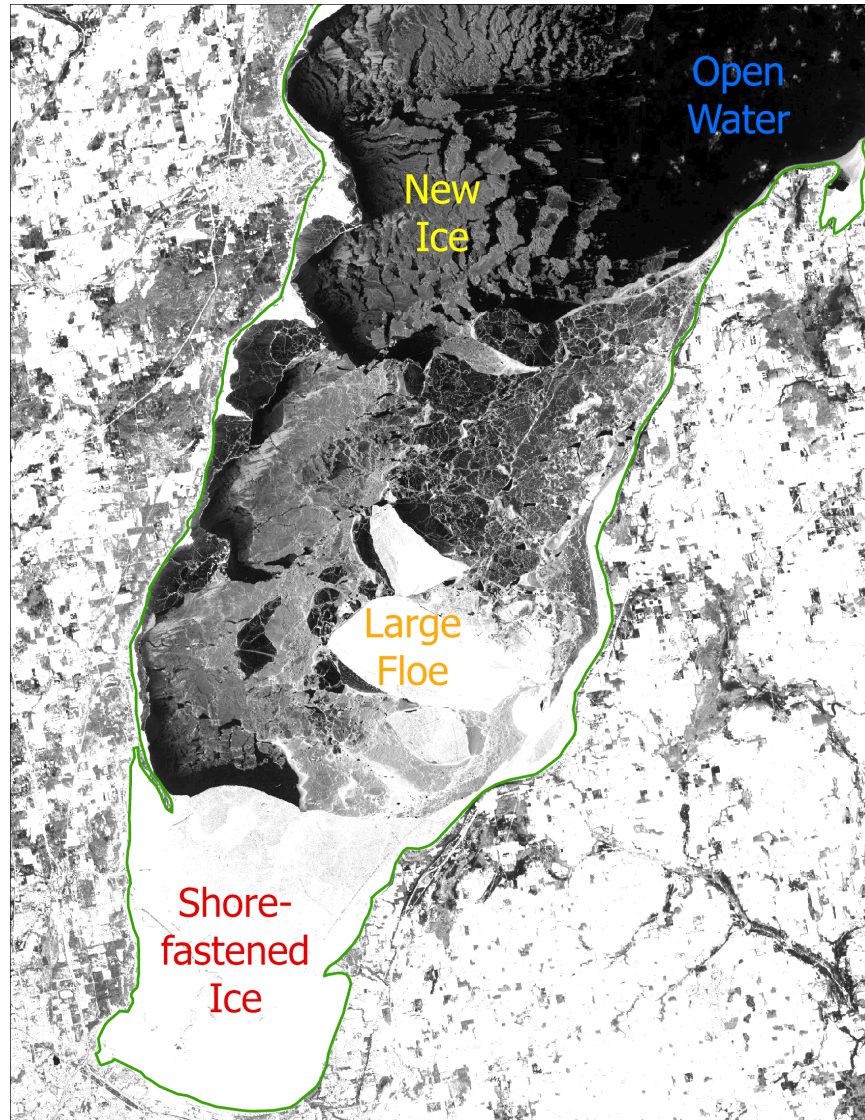


Figure 3: Sentinel-2 image of ice in southern Green Bay on 13 December 2025.

For more information, please contact:
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