

# LAKE SUPERIOR

## FACTS & INFO



They dubbed it “Superior” for a reason. The Ojibwe call it gitchi-gami, the great sea. French explorers in the 1800s called it le lac supérieur. Today, it is most commonly known as Lake Superior, the greatest and most grand of the great lakes. Much of Cook County lies along Lake Superior’s stunning shores, save for our Gunflint Trail communities, who’ve made their homes along northern Minnesota’s inland lakes and streams.

One look at this big beauty is enough to fill you with wonder and awe. From the shore, it looks and feels as vast as the ocean. It is by far the largest lake in North America and is the largest lake in the world by surface area.

In Cook County, we are proud to share the shores of Lake Superior with our friends in Wisconsin, Michigan and Ontario, Canada.



### The Cool, Clear Waters of Lake Superior

Lake Superior contains 10% of all the earth’s fresh surface water. Over 300 streams and rivers empty into Lake Superior, and it has just one outlet. The St. Marys River drains water from Lake Superior into Lake Huron. On average, water stays in Lake Superior for 191 years before making its way to Lake Huron.

Lake Superior is one of the cleanest and clearest lakes in the world, with an average underwater visibility of 27 feet. In some places, underwater visibility reaches 100 feet!

Lake Superior is also home to over 400 islands. At 207 square miles, Isle Royale is the largest. Cook County provides excellent access for exploring Grand Portage Island, Blueberry Island, Pancake Island and more.

The average annual water temperature of Lake Superior is just 40° F, and the lake is so big it doesn’t freeze over very often. The last time Lake Superior was completely frozen over was in 1979 – but it came very close to freezing over fully in 2014.

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## Lake Superior By The Numbers

**Surface area: 31,700 square miles** (82,100 square kilometers) – that’s roughly the size of the state of Maine!

**Volume: 2,900 cubic miles** (12,100 cubic kilometers) – That’s 3 QUADRILLION gallons of fresh water, enough to cover North AND South America in 1 foot of water. The only lake in the world that contains more water is Lake Baikal in Russia, which has a volume of 5,700 cubic miles (23,600 cubic kilometers).

**Shoreline: 2,726 miles** (4,385 kilometers) – if you stretched that into a highway it would be like driving from Duluth to Miami. 189 miles (304 kilometers) of those miles are in Minnesota.

**Maximum depth:**  
**1,276 feet** (389 meters)

**Average Depth:**  
**483 feet** (147 meters)

**Length:**  
**350 miles** (560 kilometers)

**Width:**  
**160 miles** (260 kilometers)

## Fishing on Lake Superior

Anglers flock to the North Shore all year round, hoping to catch a record fish or simply escape the daily grind in favor of the excitement of fishing Lake Superior. Our great lake is home to 34 native fish species including herring, lake trout, whitefish and sturgeon. You'll also find walleye and northern pike among others in certain areas.

Non-native fish species have been introduced to Lake Superior, as well. If you have your sights set on catching chinook salmon, coho salmon, pink salmon, smelt and steelhead, Lake Superior is the place to drop a line in the water. Whether you're fishing from the shoreline or out on a charter boat, you're sure to catch your limit and have a blast while you're at it.

## Lake Effect Weather Patterns

Lake Superior is so vast that it has a large impact on the weather – large enough to have a weather pattern called the “lake effect.” The big lake keeps shoreline communities cooler during summer months and a little warmer throughout the winter. You're surely wondering WHY. It has to do with the properties of water. Water takes longer to absorb heat than land, and it releases that heat more slowly, too.

In the summer, that means communities along Lake Superior's shoreline enjoy slightly cooler temperatures than our inland neighbors, and during winter, we tend to stay a bit warmer. Keep your eyes out for sea smoke when you visit Cook County this winter. It's truly a sight to behold. There's really nothing like it in the world. It happens when extremely cold air moves over warmer water during winter.

The lake effect is also the driving force behind our stormy season and has the power to transform a small storm into something epic with extremely high wind speeds and precipitation levels – both rain and snow – that are off the charts. The Gales of November occur every fall when low-pressure systems pass over the lake. Wind speeds can easily reach 50 mph, and gusts can exceed 100 mph. When the winds are blowing that hard, it's not uncommon to see the lake churn with 20-foot waves. The biggest wave ever recorded was in 2010, when a huge fall storm created waves over 26 feet high.

This stormy season is an exciting time of year in Cook County. We look forward to celebrating every year with our annual [Lake Superior Storm Festival](#). Join us in November to celebrate this dramatic and awe-inspiring season.

When the temperatures drop below freezing, Lake Superior has been known to blanket Cook County in a thick layer of lake effect snow. These heavy snows are the result of warmer, moisture-rich air coming off the lake and into contact with cooler air blown at incredible speeds. Some of these lake effect storms can drop upwards of 40" in a single system, making for prime winter adventure conditions – [and that's just how we like it.](#)

## Experience Lake Superior Your Way

There are so many ways to experience and enjoy Lake Superior during any time of the year. During springtime, we recommend fishing, boat tours or simply walking along the shoreline and listening to the waves crash onto the rocks. When summer comes around, it's the perfect time to dive in – swim, stand up paddleboard (SUP), canoe, kayak or explore the Lake Superior water trail to your heart's content.

Come fall, hop on a charter tour, book a guided fishing excursion or enjoy the view as you hike the Sawtooth Mountains or take a drive along the shore. Winter is the perfect time to gaze upon a semi-frozen Lake Superior from the top of one of the vistas that line the Sawtooth Mountain Range.

However you choose to experience our beautiful lake, you're always welcome in Cook County,

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