

## Economic Prosperity

Indicator #7043

*This indicator report was last updated in 2003.*

### Overall Assessment

Status: **Mixed (for Lake Superior Basin)**  
 Trend: **Not Assessed**  
 Note: *Data are not system-wide.*

### Lake-by-Lake Assessment

*Separate lake assessments were not included in the last update of this report.*

### Purpose

- To assess the unemployment rates within the Great Lakes basin
- To infer the capacity for society in the Great Lakes region to make decisions that will benefit the Great Lakes ecosystem (when used in association with other Great Lakes indicators)

### Ecosystem Objective

Human economic prosperity is a goal of all governments. Full employment (i.e. unemployment below 5% in western societies) is a goal for all economies.

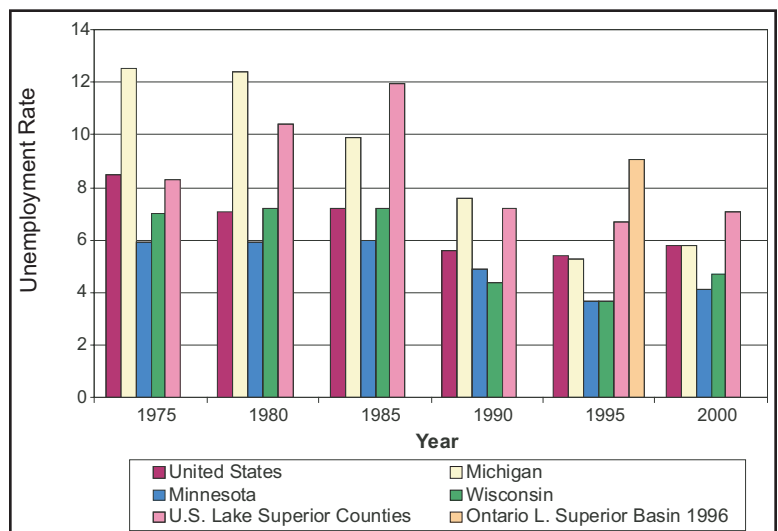
### State of the Ecosystem

This information is presented to supplement the report on Economic Prosperity in SOLEC 2000 Implementing Indicators (Draft for Review, November 2000). In 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000 the civilian unemployment rate in the 16 U.S. Lake Superior basin counties averaged about 2.0 points above the U.S. average, and above the averages for their respective states, except occasionally Michigan (Figure 1). For example, the unemployment rate in the four Lake Superior basin counties in Minnesota was consistently higher than for Minnesota overall, 2.7 points on average but nearly double the Minnesota rate of 6.0% in 1985. Unemployment rates in individual counties ranged considerably, from 8.6% to 26.8% in 1985, for example.

In the 29 Ontario census subdivisions mostly within the Lake Superior watershed, the 1996 unemployment rate for the population 15 years and over was 11.5%. For the population 25 years and older, the unemployment rate was 9.1%. By location the rates ranged from 0% to 100%; the extremes, which occur in adjacent First Nations communities, appear to be the result of small populations and the 20% census sample. The most populated areas, Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay, had unemployment rates for persons 25 years and older of 9.4% and 8.6%, respectively. Of areas with population greater than 200 in the labour force, the range was from 2.3% in Terrace Bay Township to 31.0% in Beardmore Township. Clearly, the goal of full employment (less than 5% unemployment) was not met in either the Canadian or the U.S. portions of the Lake Superior basin during the years examined.

### Comments from the author(s)

As noted in the State of the Great Lakes 2001 report for this indicator, unemployment may not be sufficient as a sole measure. Other information that



**Figure 1.** Unemployment rate in the U.S. (national), Michigan, Wisconsin, and the U.S. portion and Ontario portion of the Lake Superior basin, 1975-2000.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Statistics Canada

is readily available from the U.S. Census Bureau and Statistics Canada includes poverty statistics for the overall population, children under age 18, families, and persons age 65 and older. Two examples of trends in those measures are shown in Figures 2 and 3. For persons of all ages within the U.S. Lake Superior basin for whom poverty status was established, 10.4% were below the poverty level in 1979. That figure had risen to 14.5% in 1989, a rate of increase higher than the states of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin and the U.S. overall over the same period. Poverty rates for individuals and children in the U.S. Lake Superior basin in 1979, 1989, and 1999 ranged from 10.4% to 17.1%, while 12.8% of families in the Ontario Lake Superior basin had incomes below the poverty level in 1996. Poverty rates in all areas were lower in 1999, but the U.S. Lake Superior basin (and Ontario portion of the basin in 1996) was higher than any of the three states. The 1979 poverty rate for counties within the Lake Superior basin ranged from a low of 4.4% in Lake County, Minnesota, to a high of 17.0% in Houghton County, Michigan. In 1989 and 1999, those same counties again were the extremes. Similarly, among children under age 18, poverty rates in the Great Lakes basin portions of the three states in 1979, 1989, and 1999 exceeded the rates of Minnesota and Wisconsin as a whole, though they remained below the U.S. rate. In a region where one-tenth to one-sixth of the population lives in poverty, environmental sustainability is likely to be perceived by many as less important than economic development.

### Acknowledgments

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Kristine Bradof, GEM Center for Science and Environmental Outreach, Michigan Technological University, MI; and

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### Sources

GEM Center for Science and Environmental Outreach. 2000. Baseline Sustainability Data for the Lake Superior Basin: Final Report to the Developing Sustainability Committee, Lake Superior Binational Program, November 2000. Unpublished report, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI.

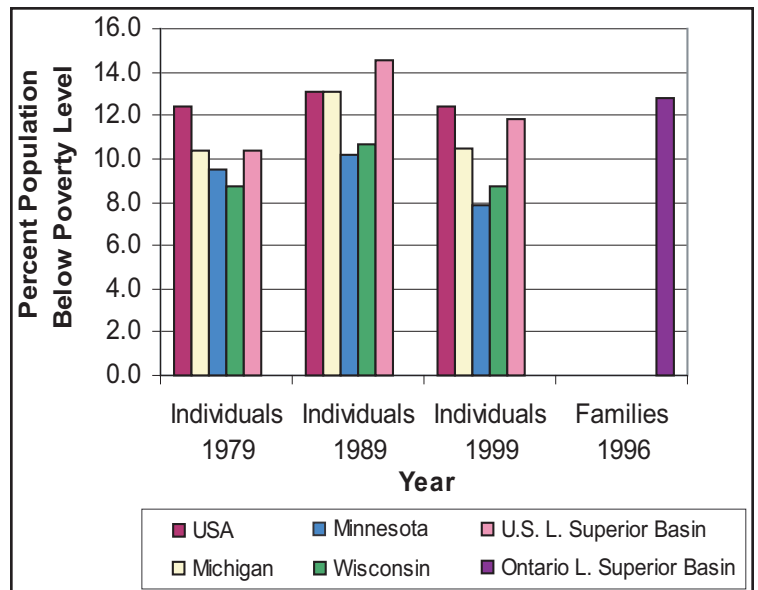
<http://emmap.mtu.edu/gem/community/planning/lbs.html>.

Statistics Canada. 1996. Beyond 20/20 Census Subdivision Area Profiles for the Ontario Lake Superior Basin.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2002. Population by poverty status in 1999 for counties: 2000.

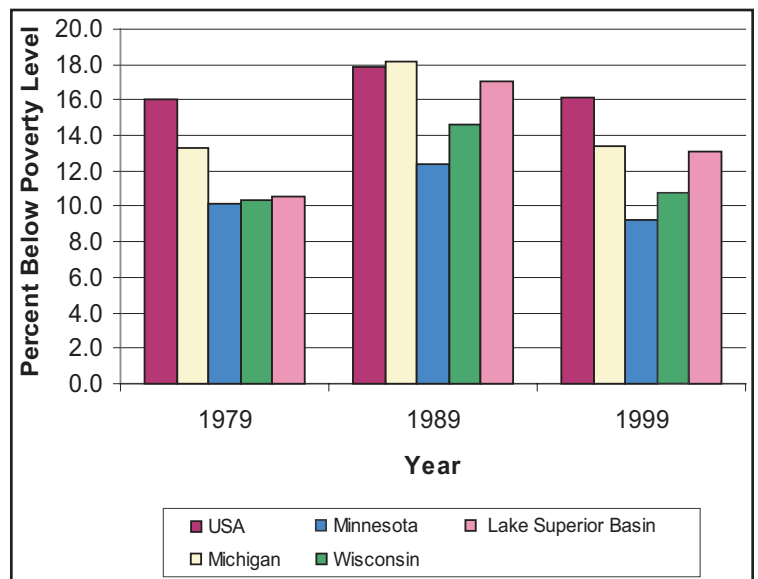
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty00/poppvstat00.html>.

U.S. Census Bureau. State & County Quick Facts 2000. Table DP-3. Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics.



**Figure 2.** Individuals below poverty level in the U.S. (national), Michigan, Wisconsin, and the U.S. Great Lakes basin counties, 1979-1999, and families below poverty level in Ontario Great Lakes basin subdivisions, 1996.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Statistics Canada



**Figure 3.** Children under age 18 below the poverty level, 1979-1999, U.S. (national), Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin and U.S. portion of the Lake Superior basin.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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<http://censtats.census.gov/data/MI/04026.pdf>.

U.S. Census Bureau. USA Counties 1998 CD-ROM (includes unemployment data from Bureau of Labor Statistics).

## **Last Updated**

*State of the Great Lakes 2003*

*[Editor's Note: Links to sources were updated for this publication when possible.]*