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**GBA Ottawa Meeting  
Thursday, May 2, 2002**

**Re: "US Army Corps of Engineer's (USACE's)  
Great Lakes Navigation System Review"**

In attendance:

- John Birnbaum, GBA Executive Director; Advisor, GBA Foundation
- Mary Muter, Chair GBA Environment Committee; Advisor, GBA Foundation
- David Britton, EA for MP Honourable Andy Mitchell, Secretary of State
- Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, US Transboundary Division
- Transport Canada, Director Seaway and Domestic Shipping Policy
- Transport Canada, Minister's Special Assistant
- Environment Canada, Manager Water Issues Division
- Environment Canada, Minister's Special Assistant
- Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency
- Department of Fisheries and Oceans
- Canadian Coast Guard

Our thanks to David Britton for arranging the meeting.

All of the above Ministries have some jurisdiction or interest in the issue of widening or deepening the Seaway Channels. GBA requested this meeting to get answers to our questions and concerns and to get all the representatives in the same room at the same time. Most of the Ministries had only recently learned about the impacts of this proposal from GBA letters and communications.

John and Mary presented our concerns and provided colour photocopies of GBAF's research on exposed dry wetlands with clear habitat loss and copies of air photos of the shoreline alteration increasing the outflow of Lake Huron with no control of the outflow in clear contrast to the controls of outflows of Lakes Superior and Ontario.

**Results of Meeting**

- Environment Canada staff confirmed our presentation of Lake Huron water levels loss when the seaway was opened (38cm), recent loss of 150cm. over 5 years due to mainly natural causes, creeping shoreline alterations and withdrawals at Lake Huron outflow, predictions of loss due to climate change (100cm. in next 20-30years), and potential loss of 38cm. or more if Seaway Channels are dredged enough to allow "Panamax" vessels in.

- Transport Canada does not consider what the USACE has done so far a “proposal”; they clarified that the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation is to comment only on the engineering aspects of the current USACE’s Reconnaissance Study. They agreed to encourage the USACEs to consider water levels impacts for the middle lakes in the next stage of their study.
- It is interesting to note that none of the government representatives consider what the USACE’s have done so far a final proposal. When a final “project proposal” is presented it may trigger a full Environmental Assessment if water levels are affected and or contaminated sediments are to be dredged. Both of these will result from any of the options in the current USACE’s Reconnaissance Study.
- Foreign Affairs agreed to review the file and to consider asking the Canadian Section of the IJC to comment. It is at the discretion of DFA to refer the USACE’s Reconnaissance Study to the IJC.
- GBA identified GBA Foundation’s research results demonstrating low water level impacts on habitats, wetlands and water access to cottages along the eastern and northern shores of Georgian Bay.
- Foreign Affairs also agreed to consider including levels and outflows of Lake Huron in the IJC’s proposed Upper Lakes Plan of Study. GBA agreed to send to DFA the wording that included levels and outflows of Lake Huron that we provided to the IJC when we were asked to peer review that document. (Post 9/11 the budget was cut and Lake Huron levels and outflows were removed.) Now with the potential of the USACE’s GLNSR resulting in a further permanent withdrawal from Lake Huron basin, the need for that to be included in the Upper Lakes Plan of Study is much more important.
- GBA indicated our understanding of the need to review the Seaway infrastructure after 50 years of use, of the pressure for increased shipping activity for both Canadian and US stakeholders. However, we were clear that water level impacts must be measured, recognition given to the past loss of 15” when the Seaway was opened and consideration of mitigating measures given before any political decision is made. Since no Canadian funding was used for the current proposals no Canadian perspectives were included.
- Transport Canada agreed that they also want to look at alternatives including the establishment of a Seaway fleet of ships designed with shallow water draft and a transfer station in the St. Lawrence River. They also agreed to consider compensating structures for the St. Clair/Detroit Rivers to reduce the outflow of Lake Huron.

- GBA made it clear that the current Great Lakes Navigation Review since it is funded entirely by the Americans does not include the Canadian perspective and concern for low water levels. We let them know that we are aware of the significant lobby by American shoreline property owners to artificially lower the Lake Huron basin so they will have bigger beaches and no possibility of shoreline erosion where in many cases they have developed too close to a naturally eroding soft sandy shorelines.
- Canadian Coast Guard suggested that no deepening of the channels could be taken independently by the Americans since our transboundary agreements required consultation with Canadian government agencies. However, Environment Canada staff pointed out that the Americans often wait until the last minute to notify the Canadian side before they begin dredging or other activity that could affect levels. Last summer they only let EC know at the last minute of their plans to dredge in the St. Mary's River on the American side but that had the potential to alter the outflow levels.

#### **Actions to be taken as a result of the meeting**

- 1) All these government agencies will now get together for the first time and figure out how they are going to respond to the USACE's GLNSR. Environment Canada said they expect to have a response for us in the next 2-3 weeks. (Prior to the meeting EC informed us that GBA had significantly raised the profile of this with the government and that we could expect some action.)
- 2) We have informed Andy Mitchell's office that there is press interest in this issue and that the sooner a Canadian government response is developed the better.
- 3) GBA will prepare an article in late May for GBA UPDATE newsletter.
- 4) GBA agreed to prepare and send to Dept. of Foreign Affairs the wording needed as originally proposed by GBA to include Lake Huron outflows and shoreline alteration in the International Joint Commission's Upper Lakes Plan of Study.
- 5) Any further communication on this issue is to be coordinated and sent through MP Andy Mitchell's office.