

Memo to GBA and GBAF Boards from Mary Muter re: Great Lakes Navigation System Review or GLNSR

In a nutshell - this is a proposal to widen and deepen the Seaway Channels to allow bigger ships to transit the system. The language used in the USACE documents is verbose and it is unclear exactly what it is they are doing. But it is clear that they have figured out what work has to be done and the costs of doing it. Our main concern is that with no controls at the outflow of Lake Huron any deepening or widening of the St. Clair River and downstream to Lake Erie will result in lower levels for the middle lakes including Georgian Bay.

The comments from the St Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation state that they have been mandated by the Minister of Transport, David Collenette to represent the interests of Canada in the USACE's GLNSR. In their submission they state that "they consider "Panamax" size vessel (1000feet in length, 110 feet in beam and 35 feet in depth) as a starting point for establishing the future optimal vessel dimension." By comparison the current maximum vessel size allowed into the locks at Welland Canal and the St. Lawrence River is 740 feet in length, 78 feet in beam and 26'3" in depth.

Earlier this week I spoke with Doug Cuthbert of Environment Canada waters levels. He will raise this with the IJC next week but he said that if this USACE plan was ever allowed to go ahead it would draw down the middle lakes as much if not more than the 15 inches that was permanently withdrawn from the middle lakes when the Seaway opened in 1959.

The following is a quote from a Great Lakes United email on this USACE plan "The Army Corps has long been considered a rather "rouge" agency-- where they can do a study on how to achieve a set "goal" (enhancing navigation on the lakes) design a big elaborate expensive plan on how to do it (bigger, deeper, wider channels!) and THEN do the environmental assessment. We are trying to pressure them into considering the environmental impact *first*, and up front incorporating the need to restore the parts of the Lakes that were hit so hard when the Seaway was opened in the first place. If they do this, and see how much they need to repair and how much they need to modify to stop future damage, we hope that increasing access to the Lake via wider, deeper channels will be totally inconceivable."

Note from Mary Muter on comments from USACE's (Chicago office) Jan Miller (environmental engineer) on the GLNSR Thursday March 21, 2002

Jan tells me that this Reconnaissance Study has been funded solely by the American government. It appears that the Canadian government may engage in the next stage which will be to consider the environmental impacts. (Environmental impacts were not considered when the Seaway was opened.)

So the USACE is scooping out what needs to be looked at in terms of environmental studies. They are looking for groups to make recommendations but also the governments will be looking at whether there is an interest in spending Federal funds on this project.

Jan suggested that comments be as specific as possible – if there are resources that would be threatened by deeper, wider channels then we should say what they are. He said they will now consider levels and flows but that we need to point out why they should consider levels and flows. In other words this is our opportunity to guide what the study should look at.

Jan is aware that Transport Canada has asked the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corp. to represent the Canadian government interests in this GLNSR but Jan said this is the time to tell our government and the USACE that we are another stakeholder that they need to consider.

Jan said he expects that the plan for the next stage (to consider environmental impacts) is due to be announced at the end of April.

So we, GBA, will comment with strong recommendations including the need to put in place compensating structures for the 15 inches withdrawn from the middle lakes when the Seaway was opened. Our goal should be to put an end to this plan forever.

Habitat Watch # 251

Great Lakes United

March 31-April 6, 2001

Mark your calendars! Great Lakes United,s 20th Annual General Meeting: June 7-9th, Chicago, Illinois

Comment to Canada funding the Great Lakes Navigational Study

A March 26th article in the Journal of Commerce reported, „The Canadian government appears to be on the verge of contributing \$10 million to a total \$20 million study by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers of the feasibility and costs of major deepening and broadening of locks and channels and dredging of Great Lakes ports to accommodate Panamax-sized ships.‰ Public comment is needed in Canada.

HW #248 reported on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plan to „review the feasibility of improving commercial navigation on the Great

Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway navigation system. Further modification of the basin to allow larger ships would give paramount interest to commercial navigation at the expense of all other values and uses of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. To reiterate, just a few of the wide-spread threats from constructing wider deeper channels throughout the basin, and allowing more numerous and larger ocean-going ships to enter the basin include:

- Dredging and scouring activities would stir up large amounts of sediments and toxic sediment
- Continued or increased number of invasive species released into the lakes
- Lower lake levels caused by substantially increasing water flow out of the system
- Impacts to wildlife due to shoreline hardening, blasting and habitat disruption
- Potential increase in oil and chemical spills due to increased ship traffic
- Worse threats if the study fails to consider impacts from climate change

If Canada does not contribute \$10 million, the Corps stated that the study would be limited to an upper lakes study--a good first step in preventing the barrage of social and environmental impacts from larger ships entering the basin. Please take a moment to write to the following Ministers and convey your opinion on Canada contributing \$10 million to this study: Minister of Transport, David Collenette; Minister of the Environment, David Anderson; Heritage Minister, Shelia Copps; Minister of Natural Resources, Herb Dhaliwal; Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Robert Thibault. The mailing address for all Ministers is: House of Commons, Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6. If funded federally, this study should also be subject to a full panel review under Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. For this reason, please send a copy of your letter to Paul Bernier, Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, 13th Floor, Fontaine Building, 200 Sacré-Coeur Blvd., Hull, Quebec K1A 0H3.

For more detailed information on Great Lakes navigation, action alerts, sample letters, detailed position statements and an economic analysis on extending the shipping season and expanding access to the River and Lakes, check out Save the River! at: <http://www.savetheriver.org/action-alert.htm>.