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GREAT LAKES NAVIGATION SYSTEM REVIEW

A plan to deepen and widen Great Lakes shipping channels threatens the region's environment at exorbitant taxpayer expense. Keeping North America's largest source of natural freshwater safe for people and wildlife depends on stopping the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Great Lakes Navigation System Review.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' draft Reconnaissance Report for the Great Lakes Navigation System Review recommends building a 35-foot ship channel from Montreal, Quebec to Duluth, Minnesota. To accommodate huge "Panamax" sized ships in the misguided hope of increasing foreign commerce, the Great Lakes Connecting Channels, St. Lawrence River and dozens of harbors would need to be deepened by 9.5 feet below the current authorized depth. In some areas, the channels would need to be widened by as much as 60 feet. The proposed feasibility study that could make this recommendation a reality is expected to cost $20 million and take six to eight years. In reality, construction costs could be $10-15 billion.

The National Wildlife Federation believes that this massive dredging project would be an ecological disaster for Great Lakes fisheries and aquatic ecosystems. The Great Lakes are home to more than 237 species of fish, including world class fisheries for walleye, bass, and muskellunge. In addition, the basin supports at least 220 species of birds and 18 species of mammals. Native species and dependent economies have already been devastated by exotic species introductions. Seaway expansion will only add to the problem.

The Corps' draft report acknowledges that hundreds of millions of cubic yards of river bottom will need to be dredged. The task of disposing of such a massive amount of dredged material, much of it contaminated, is daunting at best. The following table provides the initial dredging estimates and costs for the connecting channels and selected harbors. NOTE: The Corps gives a "ballpark" figure of $10 billion for the cost of deepening the St. Lawrence River and replacing 15 locks at the Welland Canal and St. Lawrence Seaway.

Congress should not fund this reckless plan. Instead, it should direct the Corps to work cooperatively with all Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River stakeholders to restore this critical and magnificent ecosystem.

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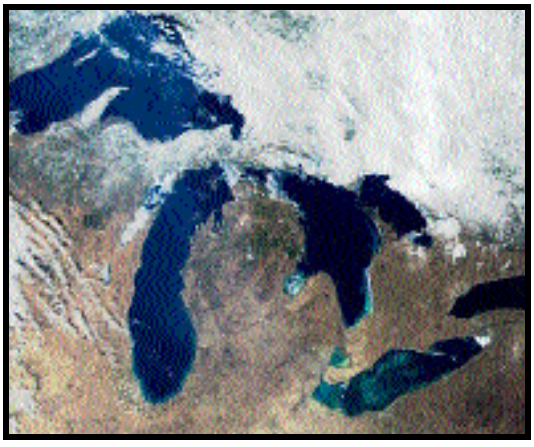

Credit: NOAA, Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory

SITE*	CYARDS-HIGH [1]	CYARDS-LOW [2]	COST HIGH [3]	COST LOW [4]
DETROIT R.-L ERIE	37,335,000	37,335,000	689,830,000	689,830,000
ST.CLAIR R&L	37,000,000	37,000,000	699,500,000	699,500,000
ST. MARYS R.	11,500,000	11,500,000	257,884,000	223,900,000
ALPENA,MI	300,000	300,000	5,900,000	5,900,000
ASHTABULA,OH	2,900,000	426,150	92,545,000	2,640,000
BURNS HARBOR	1,931,700	1,012,000	58,125,000	44,060,000
CALCITE, MI	300,000	300,000	5,900,000	5,900,000
CALUMET HARBOR	7,281,000	1,600,000	452,100,000	49,960,000
CLEVELAND, OH	12,700,000	12,700,000	321,840,000	321,840,000
CONNEAUT,OH	2,000,000	1,600,000	54,576,000	49,960,000
DETROIT	2,000,000	2,000,000	91,000,000	91,000,000
DRUMMOND, MI	300,000	300,000	5,900,000	5,900,000
DULUTH-SUPERIOR	10,300,000	5,290,000	441,807,000	172,583,000
ESCANABA,MI	740,000	37,000	82,065,000	13,900,000
FAIRPORT,OH	482,600	482,000	6,700,000	2,970,000
GARY, IN	470,000	470,000	63,425,000	63,425,000
INDIANA	1,620,000	1,055,000	64,900,000	33,260,000
LORAIN, OH	2,890,000	2,548,000	149,790,000	128,925,000
MONROE, MI	4,745,000	3,630,000	96,010,000	56,900,000
PRESQUE ISLE, MI	619,000	396,000	45,907,000	22,657,000
ROUGE RIVER, MI	205,000	205,000	5,546,000	5,546,000
SAGINAW ,MI	6,065,000	6,065,000	100,000,000	1,000,000
SANDUSKY, OH	9,900,000	1,451,350	168,275,000	8,780,000
SIVER BAY, MN	48,200	48,200	17,940,000	17,940,000
ST. CLAIR-EDISON, MI	53,700	537,000	5,372,000	5,372,000
TACONITE, MN	512,700	512,700	26,958,000	26,958,000
TOLEDO, OH	12,800,000	9,450,000	415,200,000	294,600
TWO HARBORS, MN	740,000	66,200	59,947,000	39,312
TOTALS	167,736,900	138,315,900	4,484,932,000	2750939900

1. Based on Great Lakes Connecting Channels and Harbors Study (GLCCH) 1982
2. Based on current harbor operating conditions and depths.
3. Assumes disposal of all dredged spoils in confined disposal sites; quantities based on GLCCH
4. Adjusted to current channel conditions and other current operations.

Environmental Impacts

Disposing of contaminated sediment is only one of many environmental problems that will likely result from dredging and widening the river channels. Impacts to fish and wildlife, wetlands, and water quality from operating enormous 1,000 footers on the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes include:

1. **Dredging and blasting** would destroy significant amounts of vital breeding habitat for Great Lakes fish and could cause localized fish kills. On the St. Lawrence River, portions of islands would need to be removed. Dredging would resuspend toxic pollutants such as PCBs, dioxin, and mercury into the water column, threatening fish and human health. Many of the harbors that will need to be deepened have been identified by the International Joint Commission as Areas of Concern ("toxic hotspots")

2. **Deepening and widening channels** would impact levels and flows throughout the entire Great Lakes basin creating lower levels in the Great Lakes upstream of river channels. Lakes Michigan and Huron have already plummeted by as much as a foot overall because of previous navigation project damage in the system. Downstream communities will be at greater risk of flooding of wetlands and low-lying shorelines.

3. **Increasing the risk of new exotic species** into the Great Lakes, which would likely wreak havoc on the ecosystem and threaten the $4 billion commercial and sport fishing industries. The Great Lakes Fisheries Commission estimates it will cost up to $100 million a year to control zebra mussels alone.

4. **Operating ships under winter ice conditions** causes greater disruption of bottom sediments from propellers of larger vessels. It also causes more shoreline erosion, wetlands degradation, and damage to docks and other shoreline structures. Larger ships will only magnify these problems. Part of the Corps' proposal discusses extending the navigation season.

5. **Increasing the probability and potential magnitude of oil and chemical spills**, which could devastate wildlife, recreational activities and economic livelihoods no technology exists to effectively remove oil spilled under ice.

Credit: Stephanie Weiss

Restoration Not Destruction

For three decades, the Corps has wasted tens of millions of dollars in studies and demonstration programs in a misguided effort to prove that bigger locks, deeper channels and 12-month shipping would make the Great Lakes America's "fourth coast." In reality, claims of greater Seaway traffic have never withstood independent review and additional development of the region's waterway would cause environmental devastation at tremendous taxpayer expense.

The draft reconnaissance report paints a rosy picture of annual economic benefits of up to $1.4 billion. The report claims that if the waterway could accommodate Panamax size ships the Great Lakes could potentially capture a significant segment of the international container trade. But as we have seen with past studies, once the real costs to the taxpayer and to the environment are factored in, the Corps pictures does not look as rosy. The Corps' preliminary "ballpark figure" of $10 billion for construction costs will certainly increase once estimates for environmental mitigation, disposal of polluted sediment, losses to the fishing and tourist industry, declines in riparian property values and the subsequent loss of tax revenues to the Great Lakes states are considered.

The Corps' report charts a course that can only lead to irreversible damage to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. It contradicts efforts underway to restore fisheries and aquatic habitats. The Great Lakes is the largest source of fresh water in the world. The taxpayers should not pay billions of dollars for a project that will benefit only a few special interests at the detriment of the health of Great Lakes water and wildlife.