



NEWS RELEASE

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Great Lakes Commission applauds construction start for Soo Locks expansion

Ann Arbor, Mich. – Groundbreaking for the Soo Lock expansion project at Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., was hailed today by the Great Lakes Commission (GLC) as a welcome milestone for a project long supported by the Commission.

“We take a great deal of satisfaction in seeing actual construction start on this project,” said Illinois Gov. and Commission Chair Pat Quinn. “It was a necessary project when it was authorized in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1986 and it remains needed today.”

The expansion project will create a second large lock between Lake Superior and the lower Great Lakes to accommodate the largest classes of Great Lakes bulk carriers, including the 13 1,000-foot vessels that comprise over 70 percent of the U.S.-flag carrying capacity on the lakes. At present there is only one lock at the Soo, the Poe Lock, large enough for these vessels which operate largely in the iron ore, coal and stone trades.

The first phase of construction, building cofferdams to dewater the site, was enabled by a \$17 million appropriation in the FY 2009 spending bill enacted by Congress and signed by the President earlier this year. The total project cost is estimated at \$485 million.

“For the State of Michigan and the people of the eastern Upper Peninsula, this represents jobs and continued momentum toward Michigan’s economic recovery and transformation,” said Michigan Lt. Gov. and GLC Immediate Past Chair John Cherry. “For the Great Lakes region as a whole, it is a significant investment in a navigation project that is critical to core industries such as steel manufacturing, power generation and construction, and it demonstrates how improving Michigan’s waterways is good for our regional economy.”

Great Lakes Commission involvement in the Soo Locks project dates back to 1983 when the Commission first called for replacement of the outmoded Davis and Sabin locks with a new large lock. The GLC played an active role over many years advocating funding for the lock and arranging an agreement among the Great Lakes states to serve as the non-federal cost share partner. Thanks to the efforts of Congressman James Oberstar (MN) the need for the local cost share was eliminated with the passage of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007.

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Great Lakes Commission

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“This has been a high priority of the Great Lakes Commission for 26 years,” said Todd Ambs, director of the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources water division and GLC vice chair. “While it is heartening to reach this important milestone, we must now redouble our efforts to see that Congress finishes what it started by providing adequate funding for timely completion of the project.”

With adequate funding, construction of the new large lock is expected to take up to 10 years.

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The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by Illinois Gov. Patrick Quinn, is an interstate compact agency established under state and U.S. federal law and dedicated to promoting a strong economy, healthy environment and high quality of life for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region and its residents. The Commission consists of governors’ appointees, state legislators and agency officials from its eight member states. Associate membership for Ontario and Québec was established through the signing of a “Declaration of Partnership.” The Commission maintains a formal Observer program involving U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, tribal authorities, binational agencies and other regional interests. The Commission offices are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan.