



Improving Infrastructure for Commercial Navigation and Recreational Boating

The Great Lakes constitute one of our nation's major marine transportation systems and are a vital part of both our region's and our nation's economic infrastructure. Unfortunately, a combination of factors is reducing their economic viability, including reduced funding for dredging, lower water levels in the lakes, diminishing options for disposing of dredged material and an aging navigation infrastructure. Several years of inadequate funding for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) operation and maintenance budget for the Great Lakes have created a 17 million cubic yard, \$200 million backlog for dredging of channels and harbors to their authorized sizes. Because of the shallow depths caused by inadequate dredging, the largest U.S.-flag cargo vessels on the lakes have been forced to leave as much as 8,000 tons of cargo per trip at the dock in recent years. As a result, core regional industries – such as steel manufacturing, electrical power generation, construction and agriculture – are at risk by this ongoing under-funding of the Great Lakes marine transportation system. At a time of economic distress, our regional economy cannot afford this added strain.

Shallow-draft recreational harbors in the Great Lakes (14 feet of authorized depth or less) are also impacted by a severe dredging backlog. Preceding administrations have not allowed USACE to include dredging of recreational harbors in its Great Lakes operation and maintenance budget. These harbors not only provide access to the lakes for more than four million recreational boats registered in the eight Great Lakes states, but also serve as harbors of refuge during dangerous weather conditions and operational bases for charter fishing fleets, commercial fishing operations and ferry/excursion boat services.

At the Sault Ste. Marie (Soo) Locks, some 70 percent of the U.S.-flag carrying capacity is restricted to a single lock, the Poe Lock, built in 1969 to accommodate the new class of 1,000-foot supercarriers. In the 1980s a proposal emerged to build a second similar lock to ease costly bottlenecks and reduce the risk that a single point of failure could cripple U.S. steel manufacturing, among other core industries. The Water Resources Development Act of 2007 authorized full federal funding of the Soo Lock expansion project. Congress now has an opportunity to follow through with the necessary funding to undertake this critical project.

Other navigation infrastructure on the Great Lakes – including piers and breakwaters – is also in need of critical attention. There are more than 100 miles of these structures on the lakes, many serving not only as navigation aids, but also protecting valuable coastal zones and urban waterfronts from storm surges and flooding. More than 75 percent of this infrastructure is already over 60 years old, and is now becoming even more vulnerable due to low water levels, which expose – and further deteriorate – weakened timber crib core sections.



Roger Blough, Great Lakes Fleet © Al Ballert, Great Lakes Commission.

Request: The Great Lakes Commission calls on Congress to appropriate \$105 million for the next phase of the Soo Lock Expansion Program and \$13 million to continue recapitalization of existing Soo Locks; appropriate an additional \$33 million to the Administration's proposed \$32 million for USACE Great Lakes navigation operations and maintenance; continue regional dredging programs that allocate up to \$6 million for dredging and harbor maintenance at both commercial and recreational harbors; and pass legislation to increase icebreaking capacity on the Great Lakes.

Progress to Date

The budget for the USACE Operation and Maintenance of harbors and navigation channels in the Great Lakes (including dredging) has remained virtually level for fiscal years 2008-2010. An additional \$76.2 million was provided in 2009 under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Recent funding levels are more than the levels seen during the 2002-2007 period that contributed so significantly to the current dredging backlog. The Water Resources Development Act of 2007 included a provision calling for full federal funding of the Soo Locks Expansion Project, as well as language broadening the potential for beneficial use of clean dredged materials, a provision long supported by the Great Lakes Commission.

Funding History

Navigation Priority	Fiscal Year Funding (millions of dollars)						
	2006	2007	2008	2009	ARRA	2010	GLC Request
Great Lakes Navigation (operation and maintenance)	\$67.1	\$77.2	\$103.9 ¹	\$102.8	\$76.2	\$99.7	\$65.0
Sault Ste. Marie Lock	\$1.5	\$0.5	\$1.9	\$17	\$0	\$0.97	\$118.0

¹In FY2008, USACE received an additional \$6.5 million to address the backlog of dredging projects.

Committee Jurisdiction

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water

Economic and Environmental Benefits

Commercial navigation on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway is critical to not only the economies of the eight states and two provinces in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Basin, but to the overall economic health of the United States and Canada. The system moves more than 200 million tons of cargo a year, generates over \$3 billion annually in revenue in the United States (plus another \$2.25 billion in Canada) and supports over 150,000 jobs. In addition, the marine mode of transportation in the Great Lakes has the environmental advantages of being more fuel efficient per ton/mile of cargo than truck or rail, producing fewer toxic emissions, causing fewer accidents, and having the capability of relieving congestion in heavily used surface transportation corridors.

Recreational boaters spend an estimated \$2.35 billion annually on Great Lakes boating trips, an additional \$1.44 billion to purchase and maintain their boats and equipment, and support some 60,000 jobs that generate \$1.77 billion in personal income. Increased funding is critical to address dredging and infrastructure needs in harbors that support this important sector of our economy.

More Information

Great Lakes Maritime Task Force: www.lcaships.com/glmtf.html

Great Lakes Dredging Team: www.glc.org/dredging