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## **U.S. ARMY CORPS SEEKS NEIGHBOR'S SUPPORT**

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The St. Lawrence Seaway is a major economic engine for the communities of the Great Lakes. Shippers and ports say a deeper channel for bigger freighters will add billions of dollars in trade and create new jobs. Environmentalists say replumbing the Seaway would devastate the region's ecology. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wants to move ahead on a 20 million dollar study of Seaway expansion. But it's waiting for support and money from Canada. The Great Lakes Radio Consortium's David Sommerstein reports:

The Army Corps of Engineers' study will set the Seaway's agenda for years to come. That's why ports on both sides of the border say it's important to update a system that's almost fifty years old. Keith Robson is president and CEO of the port of Hamilton, Ontario.

"You know, when it was first built, it was probably the right size and now the world has moved on, so we need to take a look at what we need to do for the future."

The world of shipping has moved on to so-called "Panamax" size. That's the term used for huge freighters that carry cargo containers to coastal ports and through the Panama Canal. A preliminary study says if those Panamax ships could squeeze into the Seaway, a billion and a half dollars more a year could float into ports such as Hamilton, Duluth, Toledo, Chicago, and Detroit.

But while bigger may be better in the Corps' projections, shippers first want to make sure the old locks keep working as is. Reg Lanteigne of the Canadian Shipowners Association says Canadian shippers rely on the Seaway to handle 70 million tons of cargo a year.

"None of our economy could sustain a catastrophic failure of that waterway. The only issue here is not how deep, how wide, how long the ditch should be, but the most important issue is how long the current ditch can last."

For the 20 million dollar study to proceed at all, Canada must fund half of it. Canada owns 13 of the Seaway's 15 locks. And the shipping channel is partially in Canadian waters. But even though a decision was expected months ago, Canada has yet to sign on. Critics believe that's because Canada sees problems in the Corps' approach.

Dozens of environmental groups across the Great Lakes have slammed the study. They say it's cooked in the shipping industry's favor. They say it's predestined to support expansion with dire environmental consequences.

Expansion foes gathered recently at a meeting organized by the New York-based group 'Save The River.' Their ears perked up when Mary Muter took the floor. She's vice-president of the Georgian Bay Association, an Ontario-based environmental group. She says Canada is wary of expansion. The first time the Seaway was dug, water levels dropped more than a foot. With even lower levels today, Muter says places like Lake Huron's Georgian Bay can't afford to lose more water.

"Wetlands have literally dried up, converted into grass meadows in some locations. Another concern is access for shoreline property owners to get to their cottages that are on islands."

There are also concerns of invasive species depleting fisheries and channel dredging

stirring up toxic sediment.

But Muter says Canada is also wary of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which has developed a reputation of skewing studies to justify more work. Muter says Canada's Transport Minister has assured her one thing. He's not interested in an expansion study that leaves environmental issues as an afterthought.

"If the U.S. transport department wants to involve the Army Corps, that's fine. But Canada is not giving money directly to the U.S. Army Corps to replumb the Great Lakes."

Both transportation departments have remained tight-lipped through months of negotiations, leaving interest groups on both sides of the debate to speculate.

Stephanie Weiss directs Save The River. She says Canada's delay may mean a chance to broaden the scope of the study beyond shipping.

"Y'know, is this an opportunity to change the shape of the study into something that more interest groups and more citizens around the Great Lakes can buy into?"

Reg Lanteigne of the Canadian Shipowners Association says the delay is just a bureaucratic one.

"The mandate has been agreed, the scope and governance has all been agreed. All we're looking for now is a suitable location and time and date to sign this off."

On the U.S. side of the border, Congress has allocated 1.5 million dollars for the first year of the study. That's less than the Corps had asked for. And the legislation includes a special warning. It directs the Corps to pay more attention to the environmental and recreational impacts of building a bigger Seaway channel.

For the Great Lakes Radio Consortium, I'm David Sommerstein.

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