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## Upping Great Lakes traffic is trouble, group warns

Thursday, September 11, 2003

By Sarah Kellogg  
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- Opening the Great Lakes to oceangoing container ships won't result in a wave of new commercial shipping and billions in additional revenues for the region, according to a new report.

Two Great Lakes environmental groups -- Great Lakes United and Save the River! -- released a report Wednesday showing that expanding the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Great Lakes system to accommodate large ships won't translate into hundreds of new container ships unloading goods at Midwestern ports from Detroit to Chicago.

"Trying to make large, oceangoing ships squeeze through the St. Lawrence Seaway and Great Lakes connecting channels isn't going to happen without great harm," said Jennifer Nalbone, a spokeswoman for Great Lakes United.

Environmentalists say expanding the locks and dredging ports to accommodate super-sized ships would damage wildlife habitats, bring invasive species in from the oceans and hurt local fisheries.

"The future of Great Lakes navigation and shipping needs to be compatible with the lakes and rivers in all their other uses," Nalbone said.

The report, which was completed by the Pennsylvania Transportation Institute (PTI), a Pennsylvania State University research group, shows that a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers study released in February is flawed.

"We believe the reconnaissance report does not demonstrate that an expanded seaway and Great Lakes ... would attract large volumes of container service," said Evelyn Thomchick, the report's lead author. "We believe the long transit times that are required to navigate the seaway and Great Lakes system are not compatible with containerized cargo."

Container ships are large, oceangoing vessels that transport various kinds of goods, ranging from televisions to tractors, in large metal containers.

The Army Corps is in the process of studying whether it makes economic, engineering or environmental sense to update the Great Lakes system's aging locks and complex series of canals, rivers and lakes. The ultimate decision is up to the U.S. and Canadian governments.

The PTI report concluded that the Army Corps study did not adequately prove that there is either the need for additional container capacity in the region or that the cost of the expansion -- in the billions -- would be offset by a thriving new container business.

A spokesman for the Army Corps welcomed input from PTI. The Army Corps has estimated that new commercial shipping lanes could contribute billions of dollars in traffic to the region.

"We're going through the evaluation of the future of this waterway system, and the additional information and viewpoints are much appreciated," said David Hewitt, a spokesman for the Army Corps.

The Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway system runs from the Atlantic Ocean to Duluth, Minn., on the shores of Lake Superior. At 2,038 nautical miles, it takes more than eight days to traverse. Along the waterway, which borders the United States and Canada, there are 19 locks for ships to maneuver through.

The biggest roadblock to bringing large ships to the Great Lakes system is the aging Welland Canal, which has eight locks and links Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. The 27-mile canal, which is located in Canada and runs parallel to the Niagara River, isn't big enough to accommodate modern oceangoing vessels.

Experts estimate that expanding the canal to accept 1,000-foot container ships could cost between \$10 billion and \$15 billion.

There are, however, 13 super-freighters, known as "lakers" versus the oceangoing "salties," traversing the lakes today. They carry iron ore, stone and coal between different ports in the lakes. They cannot leave the system because they're too large to fit through the locks at the Welland Canal.

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