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Sault News

Home News Sault News New superlock again put on hold

# New superlock again put on hold

Posted By BOB MIHELL, SPECIAL TO SAULT THIS WEEK

Posted 1 day ago

Two construction projects now underway for a proposed new superlock at Sault Michigan will end this July.

No further work is scheduled because the next phase did not receive funding in the 2010 United States presidential budget released in the new year.

John Niemiec, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project manager for the new lock, said Friday, "We're going to wind up the two contracts we have now. Once they're completed, that will be the end of construction until we get additional money to construct."

Niemiec said from Detroit that the project, however, was not completely shutout in the 2010 budget.

"We received \$969,000 in the budget that allows us to continue our engineering and design," he said.

The Corps had received USD \$17 million in the 2009 federal budget to construct cofferdams at both ends of the defunct Sabin Lock, and for excavation of the downstream channel to accommodate 1,000-foot freighters. Estimated price tag for the entire lock project that could take more than 10 years to complete is USD \$490 million.

TAB Construction Co., Inc. of Ohio was awarded the USD \$1.97-million contract in June, 2009 for the cofferdams.

Lynn Duerod, a Corps' spokesperson, had confirmed in a Sault This Week Aug. 5, 2009 article that a second contract valued at USD \$6.915 million to excavate downstream of the location had been awarded to Kokosing Construction Co., Inc., also of Ohio.

The steel cell cofferdams eventually would allow for the displacement of water inside, and the demolition of the old Sabin Lock.

While those contracts are targeted for completion in July, Niemiec said further funding from Congress is a possibility in the fall, as congressmen are putting together their own so-called "compromise budget" right now.

Niemiec said both the federal House of Representatives and the Senate would submit their budget proposals by Oct. 1.

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"Our fiscal year 2011 starts October 1 this year," he said. "Congress is putting together right now their version of the (fiscal year 2011) budget. But there is a lot of competition for funding so we will have to wait ourselves to see what might come."

What happens next would depend on how much money, if any, Congress allocates for the new lock, Niemiec said.

"If they give us \$10 million, we could come up with a project to spend that. Like I say, when Congress releases its budget, provided they provide us funds, we will look at the best way to use those funds."

But Niemiec expects construction of the new lock to proceed eventually. "Congress has funded this project, I believe, since fiscal year 1995, in varying amounts. In fiscal year 2009, they provided the largest amount at \$17 million that we used to fund these two projects. We fully expect that they are going to continue to fund this project. But what amount, we don't know, and how long it is going to take, we're not sure."

Niemiec projected in April, 2009 that the new superlock could take anywhere from seven to more than 10 years to complete depending on funding approvals.

The proposed new lock first received Congressional approval in 1986, and over the last 14 years, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has spent an estimated \$20 million on engineering and design work.

Both the Davis and Sabin locks, built in 1918 and 1919, are permanently closed. The new lock similar in size to the existing Poe Lock would replace them. The MacArthur Lock, capable of handling vessels up to 800 feet in length, remains operational as well.

  
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 Armand Le Fort Letter to the Editor-(HORNEPAYNE)NOT TOO MANY CHUCKLES IN THIS TOWN I saw a caption in the Globe and Mail (http://www.the globeandmail.com/news/opinions/roy-macgregor/huntsville-revealing-in-50-million-worthat reads, "Many in Ontario town chuckling over bonbons dished out

**HORNEPAYNE, AS IT WAS, IS, AND NOW WHAT?**  
 Gentlemen; Hornepayne is a very small community nestled in the vast forests of northern Ontario on Canadian National Railway's main line midway between Toronto and Winnipeg. My letter to you, I hope will try and explain what our problem is and ask, why is the Government of the day not

The Poe Lock, opened in 1968, is slated for an estimated \$70-million upgrade over the next six years, including the complete replacement of its hydraulic system. That system was responsible for four unscheduled breakdowns and resulting shipping delays in 2008, says a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers report.

Jim Weakley, president of the U.S. based Lake Carriers Association, had stressed in a Sault This Week article in January 2009 that 80 million tonnes moved annually through the Poe Lock.

If something were to cause it to shut down, 60 million tonnes of that cargo could not be moved by ship because 70 per cent of the U.S. fleets' carrying capacity needs the 1,000-foot Poe Lock.

Having two large locks at the Sault to handle the 1,000-foot ships would appear to be the main argument driving the project.

"Currently, we have the Poe which is the largest lock. There are approximately 40 ships that are exclusive to that lock. They won't fit through any of the other ones," Niemiec said.

"If anything were to happen to the Poe, those ships would be stranded on one side or the other of the lock. That would have a big impact for shipping because the 1,000-footers carry a large tonnage."

Completion of a second lock capable of handling the largest ships would not lead to year round use, Niemiec said. Currently, the lock system shuts down from Jan. 15 to March 25 to allow for scheduled maintenance.

"We would not extend the shipping season," he said. "That is a separate issue, and there are a whole lot of environmental considerations. But a second large lock would give us a redundancy at the Sault."

The potential for an extension of the shipping season was something that Essar Steel Algoma considered beneficial to its operations.

Brenda Stenta, manager of corporate communications for Essar Algoma Steel, had told Sault This Week in January 2009, that while the company did not rely on the bigger 1,000-foot freighters for its shipping needs, the steelmaker would benefit from a twin lock for the Poe if it led to an extension of the shipping season.

"We hope a new 1,000-foot lock would open up the possibility of year-round shipping, which would be of great benefit to our business," she said then.

Sault This Week was unable to get responses to the funding shortage that has delayed further construction of the new lock this summer from Michigan Senators Carl Levin, and Debbie Stabenow, or from Michigan Congressional Representative Bart Stupak, prior to deadline. All three have been strong advocates of the new lock at the Sault.

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Intro to Word 2:00pm

**Jun. 22, 2010**

Health and Safety - 1:00pm

Mock Interviews 1:00pm (please register)

Resume Writing 10:00am

**Jun. 23, 2010**

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