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U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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For Immediate Release:
October 20, 2010

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Initial Soo replacement lock construction contracts complete

DETROIT – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announces the completion of two contracts that initiated construction of the proposed new “Poe-sized” lock at the Soo Locks, located on the St. Marys River in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

TAB Construction Company of Canton, Ohio, completed the installation of two coffer dam cells at the Soo Locks as the first step in creating a replacement lock at the Soo. The contractor used the \$3,184,534 contract to complete construction of a coffer dam at each end of the Sabin Lock to allow for dewatering as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prepares for future construction. The coffer dams were constructed, in simple terms, by driving steel sheet piling, in a circular pattern, into bedrock then filling the cells with stone material.

In addition, Kokosing Construction Co., a small business from Fredricktown, Ohio deepened the downstream approach channel for the proposed new lock with a \$7,068,525 contract. The work was completed by Kokosing’s Durocher Marine Division of Cheboygan, Mich. During the excavation process of the downstream approach a combination of about 71,000 cubic yards of bedrock and overburden material was removed. Blasting was necessary to remove the bedrock material. The excavated material was placed in designated areas on the northwest pier, just past the International Bridge on Soo Locks property.

“With the completion of these contracts we move forward in beginning the replacement lock project using the funds that Congress has provided,” said John Niemiec, the Corps’ project manager for the replacement lock. “We look forward to receiving future funds which will be utilized to move this project to completion.”

Key sectors of the U.S. economy depend on Great Lakes shipping with many commodities flowing through the locks. In 2008, 8,461 vessels passed through the Soo Locks, carrying 80.6 million tons of cargo, mainly iron ore, coal, stone and other bulk products.

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The Soo Locks are situated on the St. Marys River at Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. and consist of four locks, of which only two are operational, allowing vessels to transit the 21-foot elevation change at the St. Marys Falls. The two operating locks are the MacArthur and Poe, which were placed into operation in 1943 and 1968, respectively. The Davis and Sabin Locks were built during the World War I era and have exceeded their design life, and due to extensive wear and deterioration are out of service. The Poe Lock is the only lock at Sault Ste. Marie capable of handling the Great Lakes system's largest vessels, which account for more than 70 percent of the potential carrying capacity of the Great Lakes fleet. Due to the significant economic consequences of a disruption of service at the Poe Lock, the new lock would have dimensions and capacity identical to the Poe Lock, which is 1200' x 110' x 32' deep with a 21.7 lift. The new lock would provide the redundancy needed to ensure continued and reliable passage through the St. Marys Falls, while also addressing security and efficiency issues.

Operation and maintenance of the Soo Locks falls under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District. The locks have been a part of the Corps' navigation mission since 1881.

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