Great Lakes Hill Happenings

JANUARY 2016

UPCOMING EVENTS

The NEMWI's Capitol Hill Reception
February 3
Washington, DC

The NEMWI's Great Lakes Environmental Summit
February 4
Washington, DC

Great Lakes Congressional Breakfast Reception
February 25
Washington, DC

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Legislative Updates	2
GLRI Update	2
FY2016 Appropriations	3
Great Lakes Note	4

Congress Ends 2015 With a Bang

Congress ended 2015 with a flurry of legislative activity that included passing a massive omnibus spending bill funding the government for the remainder of the fiscal 2016 year, legislation extending dozens of expiring tax credits, a reauthorization of the federal elementary school program and a long-term highway bill. Additionally, legislation authorizing the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative for one year and a bill banning the use of microbeads in cosmetic products were also both approved by Congress and signed into law. Even though 2016 is an election year, Congress still faces a relativity busy spring as it attempts to move all 12 appropriations bills through "regular order," and could look towards other major legislative initiatives, including legislation authorizing U.S. Army Corps projects over the next couple of years.

NEMWI Holds Breakfast Briefing on GLSNS

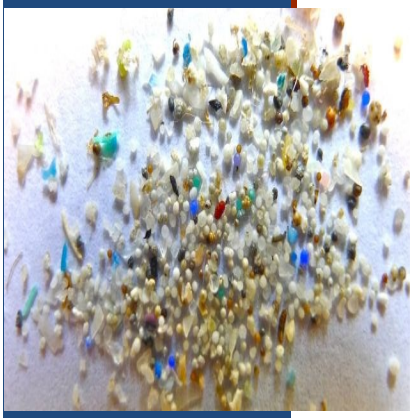
The Northeast-Midwest Institute and the Great Lakes Seaway Partnership co-hosted a breakfast briefing on the Great Lakes Seaway Navigation System on October 7, 2015. More than 50 people were in attendance to learn about the economic impacts, system investments, and maritime trade opportunities ongoing in the Great Lakes Seaway Navigation System.

Representatives Mike Kelly (PA), Dan Benishek (MI), and Sean Duffy (WI) kicked off the briefing with remarks on: the importance of membership in the NEMW Coalition and the Great Lakes Task Force, bipartisan support for repair of the Soo Locks, and the importance of bipartisan advocacy on behalf of the Great Lakes.

In addition to an esteemed panel, Betty Sutton, Administrator of the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation, described the economic and political importance of the Seaway. The Great Lakes account for one fifth of the world's fresh water and half of the Fortune 500 industrial companies have their headquarters in the Great Lakes region, which connects the world's two largest trading partners (U.S. and Canada).

Rep. Marcy Kaptur (OH) provided closing remarks, calling for creative, unified, and bipartisan thinking about the future of the seaway, something she would like to see represented in future legislation.

Legislative Updates



The Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015. On December 28, President Obama signed H.R. 1321 into law, a bill that requires the manufacturing of plastic microbeads to stop by July 1, 2017, and the delivery of new cosmetic products containing microbeads to end by July 1, 2018. Microbeads have been found in rivers and lakes in developed areas around the world, raising environmental degradation concerns among scientists and environmental organizations.

GLTF Signs on in Support for FY2017 Funding. In fall 2015, members of the Great Lakes Task Force (GLTF) signed on to several letters of support for the upcoming FY2017 appropriations process. Among the items that members of the GLTF have supported include the FY 2017 budget requests for the Brandon Road Feasibility Study, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the Great Lakes Fisheries and Ecosystem Restoration and programs promoting the prevention of Asian Carp and other Invasive species in the Great Lakes. The text of all of the letters can be viewed at the Northeast-Midwest Institute's website here.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

In the omnibus appropriations act, Congress included language that authorizes the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) for the remainder of the FY 2016 year. This is the first time that Congress has formally authorized the program, which was created in 2010 through a presidential executive order. While the authorization is only for the current fiscal year, it becomes more likely that Congress could move a multi-year authorization of the GLRI in 2016.

On September 30, 2015, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment held a hearing on the GLRI. The hearing, which was entitled "The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative: A Review of the Progress and Challenges in Restoring the Great Lakes," allowed governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to testify on the status of the current state of restoration efforts going on in the Great Lakes region. The following is a list of who testified before the Committee:

Panel I
Mr. Chris Korleski, Director, Great Lakes National Program Office, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Mr. Jose Alfredo Gomez, Director, Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Government Accountability Office
Mr. Tony Kramer, Acting Regional Conservationist, Northeast Region, Natural Resource Conservation Service
Panel II
Mr. Jon W. Allan, Acting Chair, Great Lakes Commission
The Honorable John Dickert, Mayor of the City of Racine, Wisconsin
Mr. Ed Wolking, Jr., Executive Director, Great Lakes Metro Chambers Coalition
Mr. Douglas Busdeker, Director, Ohio Agribusiness Association
Mr. Chad Lord, Policy Director, Healing Our Waters- Great Lakes Coalition

The hearing focused on a second report on the GLRI by the GAO that was issued in July of 2015. The report reviewed how federal funds have been used for restoration and preservation purposes. Among other things, the report, which can be viewed here, shows that the EPA and other partner agencies have expended $1.15 billion for 2,123 projects since the GLRI's inception.

Subcommittee Chairman Bob Gibbs (OH) led off the hearing by stating that its focus was to hear from stakeholders "on the implementation of the GLRI program and the types of improvements that need to be made to the program." A copy of the hearing's agenda can be viewed here, and an achieved webcast can be viewed here.

FY2016 Omnibus

On December 16, President Obama signed an omnibus appropriations bill that keeps the government funded through September 30, 2016. The package includes a total of $1.149 trillion in total spending, of which $518 billion is focused on domestic programs. A NEMWI factsheet of the bill can be viewed here, with some Great Lakes highlights listed below:

Commerce, Justice, Science

Funds: Department of Commerce, including National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
Regional Significance: Supports manufacturing programs and NOAA's observation and research efforts, including its work on algal blooms.
Omnibus: The bill provides NOAA with $5.8 billion. $189 million is dedicated to NOAA's Ocean, Costal and Great Lakes research and $537 million is included for NOAA's Fisheries Science and Management programs.

Energy and Water

Funds: Department of Energy and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Regional Significance: Supports maritime navigation and trade, as well as ecosystem restoration efforts and energy research and development.
Omnibus: The bill provides the USACE with $5.99 billion. A total of $2.6 billion is included for navigation projects and studies, of which roughly $1.24 billion is dedicated towards the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. The law also provides the Corps formal emergency procedures to prevent Asian Carp from passing beyond the Brandon Road Lock and Dam and contains restrictions for open-lake disposal in Lake Erie.

Interior and Environment

Funds: Department of Interior and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Regional Significance: Supports U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) restoration, research, and monitoring; provides funding for Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Brownfields, and State Revolving Funds.
Omnibus: The bill provides the EPA with $8.1 billion. The bill formally authorizes the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), and provides it with $300 million. $2.3 billion is provided for local drinking water and sewer construction projects through the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds. $1.5 billion is included for the FWS, of which $7.9 million is to stop the spread of Asian carp into the Great Lakes. The bill reauthorizes the Land and Water Conservation Fund and provides the program with $450 million. The bill also creates a new federal notification requirement for local municipalities to report any combined sewer overflow discharges into the Great Lakes.

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development

Funds: Departments of Transportation (DOT) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
Regional Significance: Supports transportation infrastructure, including TIGER, as well as community development programs like Community Development Block Grants; St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corp.
Omnibus: The bill provides DOT with $42.4 billion for highway projects and s $500 million for the TIGER program, which funds competitive grants for state and local road, transit, port and railroad construction projects. The bill provides the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation with $28 billion. The bill also funds the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) formula program at $3 billion.

Great Lakes Note

Soo Locks Study Approved



The Army Corps of Engineers and the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) have agreed to proceed with a $1.35 million study to analyze the costs and benefits of an additional shipping lock in Sault Ste. Marie, MI (Soo Locks), which connect Lakes Huron and Superior. Currently, the Soo Locks are made up of four locks, two of which are not operational (Davis and Sabin locks). Only one of the operational locks, Poe, is large enough to handle the largest freighters, which transport the majority of cargo. In June, Michigan Senators Stabenow and Peters wrote to OMB urging approval for the Army Corps' funding request for the locks expansion study. More recently, the House Great Lakes Task Force leaders circulated a letter addressed to Assistant Secretary Jo-Ellen Darcy, urging the expeditious completion of the Army Corps' Economic Reevaluation Report for replacing the Davis and Sabin Locks at Sault Ste. Marie. More details about the study and the Soo Locks are available here.

NEMWI Releases "How Clean Is Clean?"

The NEMWI released "How Clean Is Clean?" - a video describing its cutting-edge research to protect the Great Lakes from future invasive species. Produced by Ravenswood Media with funds from the Great Lakes Protection Fund, the film presents how NEMWI and its partners are preparing the Great Lakes region to manage discharges of aquatic invasive species, like ballast water.

The Great Lakes Washington Program advances Great Lakes Protection and Restoration objectives by creating a strong interface between activities of Great Lakes leadership in the region and federal leaders in Washington – particularly Great Lakes Congressional delegation members.

The program supports the goals of the Northeast-Midwest Institute, a Washington-based nonprofit and nonpartisan research, education, and policy organization dedicated to economic vitality, environmental quality, and regional equity for Northeast and Midwest states.

Matthew A. McKenna
Director, Great Lakes Washington Program
mmckenna@nemw.org
202.464.4012

NORTHEAST-MIDWEST INSTITUTE

Strengthening the Region that Sustains the Nation