



A FAULTY ARGUMENT

Closing the Seaway would violate treaties with Canada

There have been a number of articles appearing in various publications over the last several months advocating closure of the St. Lawrence Seaway to oceangoing ships as the answer to protecting the Great Lakes against further introduction of ship vectored aquatic invasive species (AIS).

This line of reasoning is not only frivolous, but also displays a stunning lack of appreciation for the implications of such a course of action.

In order to traverse the Great Lakes Seaway System, ships must pass through a series of 15 locks. Thirteen of these locks are owned by the Government of Canada; two are owned by the U.S. Government.

If the U.S. were to use its two locks as instruments to prevent ships from transiting the Seaway, it would essentially be blocking Canadian ships from accessing Canadian ports and transiting Canadian waters. Think about that for a moment. The U.S. would be forcibly depriving a sovereign nation access to its vital transportation assets and in the process destroying the value of billion of dollars of Canadian investment. This would amount to more than just an economic blockade; it would violate the treaties we have with Canada and could irreparably harm or sever our relationship with our friend, ally and largest trading partner. Some would say it would be nothing less than an act of war.

Needless to say, taking an action that would undoubtedly sever our relationship with Canada in order to protect the Great Lakes against AIS is beyond rational comprehension. In fact, it is just plain frivolous and absurd. Those who advocate closure of the Seaway have no idea of the implications of their argument, but choose to advance the argument anyway, regardless of how inane the consequences.

There is ample evidence in the public realm to dispel the notion that closing the Seaway to traffic is an effective or worthwhile idea. Yet, when rigorous, independently reviewed studies are published that

support this fact, those seeking to promote closing the Seaway either ignore such findings, at best, or mischaracterize them at worst.

Within the last year, two such studies were published. "The Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway Study," released in November 2007, found that the Great Lakes Seaway System provided shippers over \$2.7 billion (U.S.) in annual transportation cost savings. Additionally, the National Academy of Sciences report published in July entitled "Great Lakes Shipping, Trade, and Aquatic Invasive Species," concluded that closing the Seaway to transoceanic shipping would be a high-risk, low-return endeavor—an "impractical and unsatisfactory compromise." The response to these two multi-year, multi-million dollar binational studies from organizations advocating Seaway closure is deafening silence. Instead, Seaway closure advocates often cite the "estimate" of \$200 million in annual economic harm due to invasives. This so-called "estimate" is based on a seriously flawed analysis and to continue to refer to it as an authoritative finding is shockingly irresponsible.

In short, closure will not happen, so it is time to move on to more productive conversation.

Those who want to protect the Great Lakes against AIS should focus their attention on the extensive measures that are currently being implemented to do just that. For example, since 2006 it has been a mandatory requirement under Canadian law for all oceangoing ships entering the Seaway bound for Canadian ports to conduct open-ocean saltwater flushing of all their ballast tanks before entering the Seaway. At the start of the 2008 shipping season, the U.S. enacted the same requirement for oceangoing ships bound for U.S. ports. Inspectors from the U.S. and Canadian Seaway Corporations, in partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard, target every

tank of every oceangoing ship for inspection and salinity level testing in Montreal, before the ships even enter the Seaway and the Great Lakes.

It is now a proven fact: for oceangoing vessels entering the Seaway there is no more uninspected, unmanaged, or untreated ballast water or ballast tanks.

Saltwater acts as a natural biocide against freshwater organisms found in ballast water, the kind of organisms that would naturally colonize in the freshwater environment of the Great Lakes. A recent study led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Michigan examined sediment and residual ballast water contained in ballast tanks that had been flushed with full strength sea water. The study found that this practice is a "highly effective" method for eradicating potential AIS.

We can debate how we got to this point, but we cannot do anything about the past, and through new inspections, procedures, regulations and research we are protecting the Great Lakes against invasives. The days of easy introduction of AIS into the Great Lakes through ballast water and ballast tanks of oceangoing vessels are over.

The maritime industry is proactively working to find solutions and procedures for protecting the Great Lakes against ship vectored AIS. Suggesting closure of the Seaway is an unhelpful distraction, not only because it is frivolous and impossible to achieve, but also because it suggests to the uninitiated that there is a quick fix for a very complicated problem. ■

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