



ARE WE LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A PERFECT STORM?

We offer our sympathies to those who may have suffered personal losses from the recent flooding at the upper end of Lake Superior. It is difficult to lay blame on anything other than the 5-10 inches of rain that fell in the short timeframe. Climatologists suggest that, whatever the cause, these events may occur more frequently in the future.

It is a well-known fact that erosion and runoff quantity and velocity increase as forests, wetlands and natural obstructions are removed when lands in our watershed are developed. Runoff water velocity and volume can increase as much as 10 times when natural forests and wetlands are removed and replaced with effectively impervious surfaces.

Current projections for logging, mining, roads and other development in the Lake Superior watershed, if permitted, would increase the risk of wholesale damage from these "unusual" rain events. There is no state or federal framework in place to evaluate the cumulative hydrologic effects from all known potential development. In the current regulatory environment, permits would be issued and damage monitored, perhaps. Damage control is the least cost effective means of dealing with flooding and pollution. Take aquatic invasive species as an example.

Taxpayers are now financing cleanup and inspection at small boat landings. We have stated before that any North Shore stream could deteriorate into nothing more than a drainage ditch. Lake Superior itself could become more of a catch basin where "dilution is the solution to pollution".

We again encourage our members and friends to become active in land use, forestry, mining and other issues affecting Lake Superior water quality. Become an advocate. You can make a difference. Contact us for more information. LeRoger Lind



Destroying the North Country in order to save it

On June 8, Rep. Chip Cravaack introduced H.R. 5544, the Minnesota Education Investment and Employment Act. According to this bill, the remaining 93,000 acres of state land retained inside the borders of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness would be exchanged for an undisclosed amount of acreage within Superior National Forest. H.R. 5544 specifically eliminates the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process, environmental review, and public comment. In other words, the dismantling of Superior National Forest is being negotiated behind closed doors.

Of further concern, the bill does not resolve the mineral rights associated with the land exchange. This would leave the door open for future negotiations to reduce the size of Superior National Forest. Removing land from Federal ownership eliminates the watershed protections of the Weeks Act of 1911, which does not allow strip mining. (Because of the Weeks Act, PolyMet must complete a land exchange in order to dig proposed open pits on what is now Forest Service land.) H.R. 5544 facilitates the opening of a sulfide mining district throughout the Superior National Forest. State Rep. David Dill (D-Crane Lake) summarized: "We should mine, log, and lease the hell out of that land that we get in the [ex]change."

While facilitating mining, H.R. 5544 does little to enhance school trust funds. Most of the lands the state would get as part of an exchange have severed mineral estates held by private interests. Therefore no money from

mining these lands would go into the school trust. Instead, mining companies would gain an economic windfall by being able to strip mine.

At the present time, educational funding amounts to approximately \$9,000 per pupil, while the School Trust Fund adds \$26. The trust will never reach levels necessary to support today's educational system. Additionally, trust moneys are distributed state wide, so the main beneficiaries are highly-populated urban schools. Northeast Minnesota, where the destruction and pollution would occur, would receive the least amount of school compensation in return.

Rep. Cravaack claims H.R. 5544 is a jobs bill, which tells us the intent is the opening of a sulfide mining district. Yet sulfide mining is speculative, based upon experimental technology and an economy that will sustain the mining of 99 percent waste rock. Hardrock mining uses heavy machinery, rather than a large work force. A limited number of mining jobs would displace current jobs in tourism, recreation, wood products, and real estate. Already mineral exploration is decreasing property values, while the separation of mineral rights could result in condemnation or seizure of land through eminent domain.

There are other solutions to the school trust fund issue. As suggested in the 1990s, a recreational fee could be attached to permits needed for entering the BWCAW. This was estimated to add \$250,000 a year to the Permanent School Fund (PSF). The fund has lost \$2.5 million over the past ten years because northeast legislators rejected this idea in favor of holding out for a land exchange.

Likewise, a direct sale of state lands within the BWCAW to the federal government would generate money for the PSF without harming the environment for future generations of children. This proposal was accepted by the Minnesota federal delegation in the 1990s, but derailed by local legislators. Again, the money could already be sitting in the Permanent School Fund, generating interest for the schools.

Contact Senators Franken and Klobuchar immediately and ask for legislation authorizing a complete buy-out of all state lands within the BWCAW. Stop the give-away of Superior National Forest being proposed in the name of our children.

By Ellane Palcich

DNR fish trap wiped out...proving some good can emerge from disastrous floods!

The sole purpose of the half-million dollar trap on the Knife River, often damaged by the DNR, was to find ways increase the numbers of non-native steelheads sought by sports anglers in Lake Superior and its feeder streams. Meanwhile it is doing comparatively little to restore native lake trout for consumption by the public from commercial harvesting that once reached 100,000 pounds annually in Lake Superior.

Installing the trap, though a huge and foolish investment, represents only a fraction of wasteful expenditures by the DNR to put more exotic fish in the creels of anglers. The environmental damage to our North Shore streams to benefit sports anglers has been extreme. Waterfalls on eight of these streams have been destroyed (referred to as barriers by the DNR) in addition to re-configuration with jackhammers and dynamite to allow steelheads to seek spawning habitat miles upstream where they should not be.

Adding to the assault on the rivers, the DNR has regularly blown out beaver dams, thus destroying north shore wetlands which were in short supply even before this action was instituted. As the steelheads accessed more habitat, native wildlife: mink, beaver, moose, birds, amphibians and many others were deprived of theirs.

Need more proof of the indescribably bad practices by the DNR on the North Shore? To satisfy the demands of sports anglers seeking still more steelheads, it admits to spending \$720.00 for each of these non-native fish caught!

In 2003 the DNR spent \$1,314,391 to stock the steelhead and other exotics in Lake Superior. That was 64% of its budget for stocking. 36 percent, \$739,345 was all that was allocated for native lake and brook trout! Steelhead anglers have, in the past, tried to convince the DNR to reduce its program of lake trout rehabilitation...claiming the native fish was likely preying upon their favored non-

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native. Actually, there's suspicion the opposite may be true.

In my opinion, several steps must be taken to correct the apparent out-of-control state agency:

No funds should be allocated for a new fish trap, legislation should be passed to place a permanent ban on future destruction of our waterfalls, stocking of any non-native fish species should be prohibited and beaver dam removal on the North Shore forbidden except where personal property is caused.

Finally, to this date the DNR has never launched a study to determine whether introduced salmonids (steelhead, brown, coho and chinook) could negatively impact our native species or otherwise harm the environment! The agency has had more than a half-century to find out. Would I be guilty of cynicism in suspecting the DNR doesn't want to know the answer?

I trust there will be no effort to replace the jumble of steel plates. Glenn Maxham

Carp invasion of Lake Superior may be possible but far off!

Just in case you were wondering, it looks like Asian carp would have little trouble settling into the Great Lakes if they ever make it there. So says the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada – the agency that oversees water resources for that country's government – issued a report this month assessing how the species commonly known as Asian carp would fare if they reach the Great Lakes (the most likely entry point being in the Chicago area into Lake Michigan).

The report said it would take about 20 years for the carp to spread through all the lakes, with their invasion coming more quickly in lakes Michigan, Huron and Erie. Researchers said the voracious feeders would find suitable habitat and food in much of the Great Lakes basin.

The researchers also said it would take as few as 10 mature females and 10 or fewer males to have a better-than-even chance of establishing a foothold in a given lake, if they make it to tributaries to spawn.

At present Asian carp are being blocked from entering Lake Michigan at Chicago by electronic barriers, though the Army Corps of Engineers has said the species remains well south of those barriers at their point. However, carp DNA has been found at Lake Calumet in Chicago, and natural resources officials are looking for any additional evidence – with an intense response effort this week – that the carp have made it to Lake Calumet.

It ranked the ecological consequences as moderate throughout the lakes (except in Lake Superior, where it was ranked as low) in the first 20 years and high for all the lakes (except Lake Superior, where it was ranked as moderate) 50 years after Asian carp reached the Lakes system.

The report concluded, "The Asian carp are moving toward the Great Lakes far faster than the government response, and this report shows that the cost of inaction will be devastating." Glenn Maxham

IJC to consider changes in the release of Lake Superior water.

There could soon be a new plan to regulate water flow in Lake Superior thanks to a five-year study from the international agency that monitors the Great Lakes.

The plan is welcome news for Shirley Dolph, who has owned a cottage on Lake Superior since the 1970s. She said, in recent years, she's seen big changes in the water levels — so much so that she had to sell her boat. Dolph says water levels have fluctuated so much that she could no longer use her boat. "We don't go boating at [all]," she said. "I couldn't even get in my canoe for a long time ... the water level drops right down in the fall and then we don't get any water again till about May."

Dolph addressed her concerns at a meeting hosted by the International Joint Commission. The commission, with members from Canada and the United States cooperatively manages boundary waters. It plans to provide smaller and more predictable water level changes in the Great Lakes. One method would be to adjust the flow of water through hydropower plants according to peak hours of electricity demands. Dereth Glance, a spokesperson with the International Joint Commission, said small changes to Lake Superior water flow will hopefully create more consistency.

"There's a natural fluctuation in the environment we want to mimic that as much as possible," she said. Glance noted climate change is causing the current fluctuations in water levels and it's hard to predict how water levels will change over time. "You have to remember it's very, very small what humans can do for Lake Superior," Glance said. "We don't have a very clear crystal ball of whether we're going to get more rain, less rain, and what the impact's going to be on the lake." The changes are also hoped to encourage more Lake Sturgeon to spawn, she added.

The commission held public meetings in cities around the Great Lakes in mid-July. It will also accept public feedback on the plan — formally known as Lake Superior Regulation: Addressing Uncertainty in Upper Great Lakes Water Levels — until Aug. 31.

The waters of the upper Great Lakes meet many diverse needs of the more than 25 million people who live in the basin: from drinking water to electrical power generation, from industrial manufacturing to food crop irrigation, from recreational boating to commercial shipping. They are important to the economic and cultural lives of Native American communities and First Nations.

The lakes and connecting rivers also maintain wetlands and fisheries. In the entire upper Great Lakes basin, water levels are affected by regulation at only one location upstream from Niagara Falls: at the outlet of Lake Superior on the St. Mary's River.

The IJC issued Orders of Approval in 1914 for hydropower development on the St. Mary's River and the first Lake Superior regulation plan was implemented in 1921. Since 1921, seven different regulation plans have been used to determine Lake Superior outflows. The current plan, 1977A, has been in force since 1990.

SLSA has seen no studies yet relating to the impact on the lake level, if any, from the June flood that channeled massive amounts of rainfall into Lake Superior from the Twin Ports and from North Shore rivers. Glenn Maxham

Impact of the flood on Lake Superior to be the focus of annual meeting!

The June deluge took its greatest toll on homes, bridges and businesses, but also on the Lake Superior ecosystem. Though research will continue for months, perhaps years, to determine to extent and duration of the lake as the ultimate receiver of the billions of gallons runoff from the land, compelling data will be available for the annual meeting.

It convenes on Saturday, October 13 and once again we will gather in the Trailhead building in Split Rock State Park. Registration begins at 8:00 AM with the start of the program an hour later.

The St. Louis, largest of rivers in northeastern Minnesota, ravaged the land as it flowed over its banks and moved vast amounts of woody debris and washed tons of silt into the delta, leaving a damaging amount in homes in its path. Various North Shore rivers also sent loads of detritus and soil into the big lake. Aquatic life, especially fish, will benefit from the nutrients washed into their feeding grounds.

As we reported in previous issues, the estuary of this river has been a major point of study, reclamation and rehabilitation by the National Estuarine Research Reserve. It's the largest of its kind on Lake Superior.



photo courtesy NOAA

The education coordinator for the Research Reserve, Deanna Erickson, promised to provide a speaker (she may come herself) to explain the project and tell us how the agency's research in this estuary may be used as a model for other locations on the Great Lakes.

We plan to show an informative and esthetically enjoyable video on western Lake Superior's estuaries including those in the deltas of the St. Louis and Nemadji rivers. Its a production of the Wisconsin Coastal Management and goes on a camera tour of these river mouths before the flood. Glenn Maxham

We strongly urge SLSA members to attend this meeting!

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