

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-610](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Great Lakes-Seaway system extends 2,300 miles and serves more than 100 ports in the United States and Canada. Four of the 17 locks that enable navigation are managed by the Army Corps (within the Department of Defense) and U.S. Seaway Corporation (within the Department of Transportation). The rest are managed by Canada. A 2007 U.S.-Canada study noted the system could absorb additional traffic and led to U.S. asset renewal plans to improve lock infrastructure condition.

GAO was asked to review efforts to modernize the Great Lakes-Seaway. This report examines (1) shipping trends since 1980 and factors affecting recent trends, (2) stakeholder views on challenges to use, and (3) the extent to which the Army Corps and the U.S. Seaway Corporation have made progress on and measure performance of lock renewal efforts. GAO analyzed Seaway and Army Corps shipping data from 1980 through 2016, the agencies' asset renewal plans, and interviewed 24 stakeholders, including port and shipper representatives, selected to represent a range of perspectives.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that (1) the U.S. Seaway Corporation establish a process to identify, analyze, and monitor risks to the system's use to inform future actions, and (2) the Army Corps develop and adopt goals and measures to assess the performance of the Soo Locks and assess of asset renewal outcomes. The Departments of Transportation and Defense concurred with our recommendations and provided technical comments which we incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-18-610](#). For more information, contact Susan Fleming at (202) 512-2834 or flemings@gao.gov.

September 2018

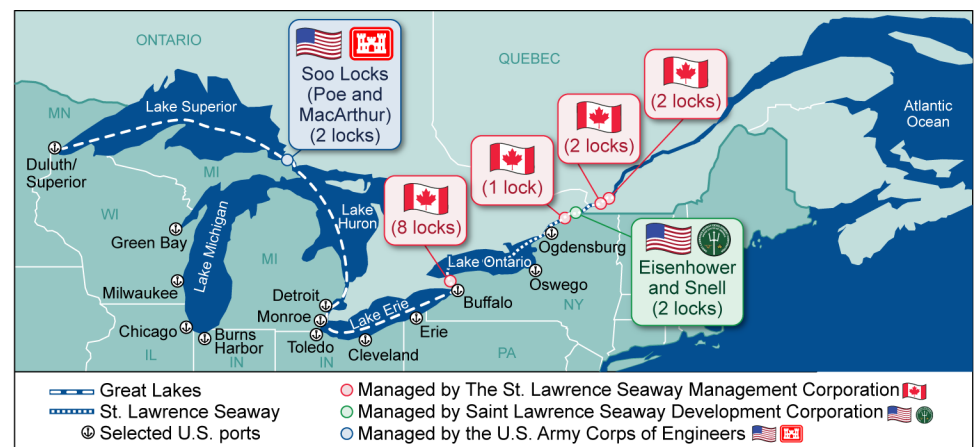
GREAT LAKES-ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY

Assessing Risks and Measuring Performance Could Improve Maritime Transportation

What GAO Found

The tons of cargo moved by domestic Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway traffic have declined since 1980—by 32 and 48 percent, respectively, according to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps) and Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation (U.S. Seaway Corporation) data. Stakeholders identified various factors for this decrease such as the U.S. economy's shift away from manufacturing. Traffic on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway (Great Lakes-Seaway) is traditionally dominated by bulk commodities like iron ore, although stakeholders noted emerging uses like containerized cargo and cruises.

The Great Lakes- St. Lawrence Seaway Navigation System



Sources: GAO and Map Resources. | GAO-18-610

Stakeholders identified a range of challenges to using the Great Lakes-Seaway—such as inadequate portside infrastructure for intermodal transfers of shipping containers—that together pose risks for both traditional bulk cargos and emerging uses. Although the U.S. Seaway Corporation's mission is to improve the system's utilization and reliability, the Corporation has not fully assessed the risks that challenges pose to the system's users. Establishing a process to assess and monitor risks, in accordance with federal internal control standards, would help inform future actions to address identified and emerging challenges.

The U.S. Seaway Corporation and the Army Corps have made progress on lock asset renewal efforts, but the Army Corps lacks goals and measures to assess performance and outcomes of these efforts. According to estimates provided by the Army Corps, it has completed 18 projects totaling about \$53 million to date, and has about \$257 million in remaining and ongoing work through 2035. Meanwhile, the U.S. Seaway Corporation has completed 16 projects totaling \$45 million and has almost \$144 million in remaining and ongoing work through 2023. The Army Corps has not developed goals and measures to assess its asset renewal results, as the U.S. Seaway Corporation has done. As a result, the Army Corps lacks tools to assess the outcomes of these efforts and demonstrate the extent to which its asset renewal efforts have improved operational performance of the Soo Locks.