



# Save Lake Superior Association – Winter 2009

Dedicated to the restoration and preservation of this Great Lake

[www.savelakesuperior.org](http://www.savelakesuperior.org) ↗

## **Loopholes in the Great Lakes compact ?**

Fears that industry may seek loopholes in the newly enacted water management compact prompted a move by environmental groups to seek amendments to the document. The compact became effective on Dec. 8.

Following a November rally in Traverse City, MI, the coalition hopes to (pardon the pun) put a plug in the compact to prevent leakage into the containers of multinational corporations.

The proactive Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation attorney, Jim Olson, is calling for rewording the document. The agreement, ratified by eight Great Lakes states, should make certain, says the Michigan group, that it's legally understood that the water is a publically owned resource unavailable as a commercial product.

Predicting that lawyers could find chinks in the body of the compact and invoke tenets of the international trade laws, access should be denied to commercial interests through action in Congress, according to the coalition's position.

*SLSA supports, in principal, the effort to seal the loopholes.*

## **A new approach in the invasive species battle!**

A lowly bacteria, *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, could be of value in ridding the Great Lakes of the quagga and zebra mussels. According to the Chicago Tribune story the testing phase of the study has just begun but, to date, the preliminary results appear to be promising. The assault on the bivalves is the brainchild of Daniel Malloy of the New York State Museum. He cautioned that the bacterium, if proven to be a effective, would not spell the end of quaggas and zebra mussels. He said the spread of these invasives is simply "too big."

The Ruffe, one of several exotic fish, unfortunately, would not be harmed by the bacteria. Other means to wipe it out are yet to be found but research continues with increased vigor.

When the bacterium was fed in a laboratory tank containing the mussels and native species, along with sunfish, trout and fathead minnows, the non-natives died and all the other native aquatic life survived.

Permits from the US EPA are now being sought to do further tests in western sites.

## **Another fish consumption advisory!**

This past summer U of M scientists, working in the Duluth-Superior harbor, examined the digestive tracts of fish living there and found a new problem with a potential health threat. In the shallow water off the Southworth Marsh on Minnesota Point they collected carp, brown bullheads, rock bass and white perch and non-native Eurasian ruffes and round gobies.

The intestines of these fish were found to contain e. coli like the bacteria from humans and birds. It was explained that the fish didn't generate the bacteria but probably ingested it when eating food contaminated with feces.

The research was part of an ongoing project funded by Minnesota Sea Grant to pin down the origin of the bacteria that has forced the closing of local beaches bordering the harbor.

Quoting UMD biology professor Randall Hicks in Sea Grant's Seiche magazine Hicks stated, "Anglers shouldn't worrying about using the fish as food. They should just be careful not to cut open a fish's intestine." Jeff Gunderson, associate director for Sea Grant, suggested that the fish should be thoroughly washed with clean water and then fully cooked.

## **New Venue for our Annual Meeting**

Though months away, pre-planning work for the 2009 gathering has resulted in selection of a new site to make attendance more convenient this year. We, and we hope you, will meet on **Saturday, August 15<sup>th</sup>**

in the Family Center at Bayfront Park on the Duluth waterfront adjacent to the Aquarium—more details in later newsletters.

### **Impaired Waters of Minnesota: 2008 report.**

This Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's summary has been in circulation for some months now but our recent review prompts us to further elaborate on this depressing document. We concentrated, of course, on the chapter devoted to the rivers and streams that directly or indirectly drain into Lake Superior. Mercury is the most common (and most alarming of the toxics) with evidence found in fish tissue in more than seventy-five of these water sources—this finding, in the words of the PC A, led to labeling the "affected use" as its concern for "aquatic consumption."

The St. Louis River was given a particularly bad report . Analysis at various locations in this major waterway turned up evidence of PCBs in fish tissue, dieldrin, that old bugaboo DDT, toxaphene, fecal coliform and dioxin.

The MPCA explained that " A waterbody is defined as impaired if more than 10% of the fish in a species are greater than 0.2 ppm." It further noted that impairments from mercury concentration in fish tissue that exceeded 0.2 ppm , the upper threshold for one meal per week consumption advisory applies to the "sensitive population (pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, and children under the age of 15"). ;

Thirty-four fish species were represented among the impairments and, the agency determined, many lakes had multiple species that were impaired.

Walleye and northerns were in 90% of the impaired lakes and 68% of the rivers in the watersheds examined.

Elimination of toxics (or at least reducing them to safe levels) is an agonizingly slow process. In the St. Louis River, for example, work on mercury remediation began in 1998 but the MPCA projected date for completion is not until 2011.

There's been no word from this agency that it's funding for pollution cleanup may be slashed due to the severe economic times ahead, but we can't imagine that a cutback is an impossibility.

### **Sacrificing Shoreline for Road Aggregate ?**

At the far eastern end of Lake Superior such a travesty will happen if the Ontario Municipal Board allows a U.S company — Superior Aggregates — to mine rock from a 1,000 acre site on Canada's Michipicoten Island. It would be taken by freighter to Michigan to build highways.

The Save Lake Superior Association has responded to the Citizen Concerned for Michipicoten Bay <http://www.ccmb.ca/> request for our support. Board member Arnold Overby has been in contact with this group and put us on record in opposition to the pending destruction in which mining operations would clear away the trees and ground vegetation on the scenic property within 200 feet of the shoreline.

CCMB's concern, and SLSA's, is that removal of the coastal rock has the likelihood of causing a threat to water quality and thus impact aquatic life.

The citizen's objection to the project includes fears that it would hurt the potential use of this scenic location as a destination for adventure tourism.

### **Lake Superior expanding ice cover is a blessing**

Temperatures in the ten degrees below normal range at year's end has, at least for now, provided a surface cap that reduces evaporation. Combined with above average snowfall, lake levels benefit.

**Meet Sally Manger**, a new member of your board. Her name is well known around Lake Superior's environmental communities— her late father-in-law was State Rep. Willard Munger, her husband is Willard, Jr., also a board member. She's a member of the League of Women Voters and is on its Natural Resources committee. A year ago she went to Washington to meet with the Minnesota Congressional Delegation to update them on issues relating to the Great Lakes. A U of MN graduate, she worked 27 years for the Minneapolis Public Library, in the next newsletter we will introduce you another new board member, Jim Lind.

## **What Happened to Smelt Numbers?**

Where did they go? Will they come back? These are questions Minnesota Sea Grant would like to be able to answer...as would the thousands who love to net and eat these tasty little morsels.

Smelt are, in fact, another invasive species but, unlike the gobies, zebra mussels and more than the other 175 non-natives that were not welcomed in the Great Lakes, the smelt were stocked in the St. Mary's River four times over a thirteen year span.

They multiplied vigorously, headed west and came to Minnesota's waters of the Great Lakes in 1946.

By 1941, says Sea Grant, commercial fishermen in Lake Michigan harvested 4.8 million pounds. The following two years saw a steep decline in their population in Lakes Michigan and Huron.

Their proliferation in our lake developed after the sea lamprey greatly reduced the native lake trout, a major predator that had kept their numbers low.

The smelt harvest here totaled only 21,000 pounds in 1953. By 1976 the take was more than four million pounds.

Sea Grant noted that two years after the peak numbers these fish became scarce during a sharp decline

The crash was so severe it's unlikely they will ever again be seen in the super-abundance of 1960 to 1978, according to Sea Grant.

It's possible the increase in predators now numerous in Lake Superior can be blamed.

## **Reader's Corner**

Are you a member who would like to compose an article for our quarterly newsletter? We are interested in hearing from you. The article content can be opinion or information. The topic needs to be consistent with current issues and will be reviewed by the board prior to acceptance. Limit article to 500 words or less.

Submit hard copy to our PO Box, or go paperless and e-mail to [mail@savelakesuperior.org](mailto:mail@savelakesuperior.org)

## **Ballast Water Permit Controversies**

Effective regulation of ballast water discharged by salties and lakers into Lake Superior waters has again been suppressed by shipping interests. The Wisconsin DNR correctly concluded that the USEPA pollution discharge permit for these vessels does not prevent transport of invasive species carried in ship's ballast from polluting Lake Superior's waters. However, Wisconsin has not developed a permit to require the treatment of ballast water as has Minnesota's MPCA. They have conceded that preventing shipping traffic from discharging untreated ballast water after December 19<sup>th</sup> 2008 would be too drastic an action at this time. WIDNR have vowed to develop a permit to require ballast water treatment in the next year.

As has been reported in previous newsletters, SLSA along with the IKES and Trout Unlimited are suing the US Coast Guard and the US Dept of Agriculture (APHIS) for not preventing the transport and discharge of invasive aquatic species (especially VHSV) across state lines into Minnesota waters. We are seeking immediate, effective treatment of ballast water discharged from both ocean ships and Lakers. As we well know, once these toxic pathogens and invasive species are here we can't send them home. A report on our federal court case will follow in the next Newsletter. The Defendants are currently trying to have the case dismissed!

LeRoger Lind, SLSA president

## **Barrel issue update**

Working for the public interest group Nukewatch, John LaForge tells us his research in the St. Paul office of the Minnesota Pollution Agency led to an impasse when he discovered 102 pages in the Preliminary Assessment documents on the barrels are missing!

To date, LaForge has been unable to obtain these pages from the agency. Could the missing pages contain information the MPCA would rather we didn't see?

Barrels were checked for radiation and the MPCA was satisfied they didn't contain nuclear waste. In another file John found a letter from Health Physicist Mark O. Selmer of the EPA's Office of Radiation programs to the St. Paul District office of the Corps of Engineers. Selmer stated

"Because the underwater probe (used in the Duluth probe) is insensitive to the presence of alpha and/or beta radiation, no conclusions concerning the presence or absence of radionuclides which are pure alpha or beta emitters can be made." New tests with the proper equipment are imperative.

## **Can you solve this puzzle?**

Have any ideas about this picture? Here's what I know and am waiting for an explanation that's truly convincing. One December morning just after dawn, I looked from my bayside window onto the Duluth anchor basin. There on the newly formed, snow dusted, very thin ice cover was eight nearly identical ice-free circles that appeared to be about three feet in diameter.

The three at the top of my picture, and the five unseen to the right, were in a fairly straight line and more or less evenly spaced near the shoreline for a length of about two blocks.

An acquaintance who works as a researcher at the EPA water lab in Duluth speculated that rotting aquatic vegetation might have released bubbles that kept ice from forming when they rose to the surface.

That was possibly a plausible explanation, yet the odds that eight such circles, virtually of the same dimension and at nearly equal intervals leaves me deeply puzzled.

If you have an idea of the cause of this odd phenomena, please e-mail us. Our address is [mail@savelakesuperior.org](mailto:mail@savelakesuperior.org) We would like very much to hear from you. By the way, the ice sheet began to break apart just before I could ready my camera, thus the cracks running through the formation.

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## **Your SLSA Board Members**

LeRoger Lind (President), John Lind, Nancy Paisley, Glenn Maxham (VP and newsletter editor), Will Munger, Jr., Sally Munger, Deb Ortman, Alice Pierce (Treasurer), Arnold Overby, Todd Ronning, Alison Contos - Member Emeritus.

**SLSA Membership is still only \$5.00 per year per person.**

**Lifetime membership is \$100.00 per person**