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Soo Locks Open Early for 2024 Shipping Season

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich. – The Soo Locks in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan will open the Poe Lock to all marine traffic at 6 p.m. on March 22, marking the start of the 2024 Great Lakes shipping season.

The shipping industry requested an early season opening due the urging of major steel producers. “The St. Lawrence Seaway has announced that it will open this spring on March 22. We would like to match that early opening at the Soo,” President of the Lake Carriers’ Association James Weakley said. “We also note that the Seaway strike in 2023 and extreme wind events toward the end of the last operating season left the fleet with undelivered cargo.”

“Our winter maintenance period is a critical time for us to invest in our aging locks,” Detroit District Commander Lt. Col. Brett Boyle said. “This year, a number of factors worked in our favor that allowed us to safely deliver this critical maintenance and also open to navigation traffic a few days early, with the St. Lawrence Seaway.”

Federal regulation (33 CFR 207.440) establishes the operating season based on the feasibility of vessels operating during typical Great Lakes ice conditions.

The locks officially closed after the last vessel of the 2023 season on January 16, to undergo critical repairs and maintenance during the 10 week-long winter shutdown. Maintenance crews performed a variety of critical tasks on the Poe Lock, including structural inspections, maintenance, and installation of lifting lugs on the upstream miter gate. On the downstream miter gates crews installed anchorage components and completed critical structural repairs. Major rehabilitation continued on the Poe Lock’s upstream and downstream ship arrestor systems.

“We worked hard to accelerate work up-front during our annual closure, with crews working extended days and hours to optimize the short time available for critical maintenance and repairs,” Maintenance Branch Chief Nicholas Pettit said. “Due to the hard work of our maintenance crews and some mild weather, we’ve been able to accomplish all required work ahead of schedule.”

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“We welcome visitors into the park for the 2024 Soo Locks season opening,” Chief Park Ranger Michelle Briggs said. “The park and viewing platform will stay open until 8 p.m. to allow visitors to watch the first ship from the viewing platform.”

All persons entering are subject to a security search at the Soo Locks entry checkpoint. Firearms, weapons, drugs, pets (except service animals) and bicycles are not permitted.

For those unable to attend in person, the Detroit District will host a Facebook Live of the event at <https://www.facebook.com/USACEDetroitDistrict> starting at 5:55 p.m.

The MacArthur Lock, located south of the Poe, will remain closed for maintenance until April 24.

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