Synopsis

The Port of Duluth-Superior

By far the largest tonnage port on the Great Lakes – and among the top 20 ports in the nation – the Port of Duluth-Superior handles nearly 38 million tons of cargo each year. Nearly 1,000 vessels visit the harbor in a single shipping season – huge lake carriers (“lakers”) and smaller oceangoing ships (“salties”) – carrying mostly bulk cargoes of iron ore, coal, limestone, grain, cement, salt, plus general cargo like wind components.

Located the farthest inland at 2,342 miles from the Atlantic Ocean (less than a week’s sailing time), the Port of Duluth-Superior links the heartland of North America to the rest of the world via the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway (GLSLS). The Port sits at the mouth of the St. Louis River which means we are at the headwaters of this entire inland waterway system – a bi-national marine highway that is bordered by 8 U.S. states and 2 Canadian provinces.

To get to the “Twin Ports,” oceangoing ships (‘salties’) must navigate 16 sets of locks on the GLSLS, including eight in Buffalo, NY (i.e. the Welland Canal, which bypasses Niagara Falls). ‘Lakers’ spend their entire working lives on 4 of the 5 Great Lakes, being too wide to navigate any of the locks except those at Sault Ste. Marie.

Ballast water is used to stabilize ships – to keep them balanced (‘in trim’) when carrying no cargo or only a partial load. The maritime industry is committed to taking steps with ballast water exchange and treatment to minimize and eventually eliminate the transport of aquatic invasive species. Today, moving cargo by water remains the safest, most fuel efficient, cost effective, and environmentally friendly mode of transportation.

Did you know?

- It takes nearly 700 railcars of iron ore pellets to fully load just ONE 1,000-foot laker.
- At normal water levels, that laker can carry nearly 70,000 tons of pellets – enough to make 45,000 tons of steel.
- It would take seven, 100-car freight trains or 3,000 huge tractor-trailers to haul that same amount.
- Steel made from that single boatload of pellets can be used to manufacture 55,000 compact cars.

Reference links:

Duluth Seaway Port Authority www.duluthport.com
Duluth Shipping News/DuluthBoats www.duluthboats.com
Marine Delivers www.marinedelivers.com
Great Lakes-Seaway system www.greatlakes-seaway.com

Vocabulary List:

Ballast water
Bi-national
Great Lakes
Headwaters
Lakers
Locks
Marine
Maritime
Salties
St. Lawrence Seaway