**From Bill Boik (MDNR):**

Great Lakes deal in Congress may boost dredging efforts:

<http://www.freep.com/article/20140516/NEWS06/305160032/great-lakes-dredging-harbor-asian-carp>

WASHINGTON — A compromise measure on water resources development unveiled in Congress Thursday could result in more spending for dredging Great Lakes harbors and shipping channels, though it wasn’t immediately known how much more might be available.

The conference committee report — congressional shorthand for a compromise reached on competing versions of legislation between the U.S. House and Senate — emerged Thursday on the Water Resources Reform and Development Act, a measure which has been stalled for months.

U.S. Rep. Candice Miller, R-Harrison Township, was the only Michigan member of Congress to serve on the House-Senate conference committee. She said the agreement, which will be voted on next week in both chambers, includes a proposal she and others in the state delegation pushed to designate the Great Lakes as one comprehensive navigation system.

By doing so, Great Lakes projects could be prioritized nationally and become eligible for more funding by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, rather than competing against one another.

“This new designation will finally allow the Great Lakes to present a unified front when competing against coastal regions for federal funding and resources.” Miller said.

The legislation also includes increased expenditures through the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, which is funded through taxes on shippers but only part of which has been made available for projects in recent years. Last year, the Free Press wrote how billions in surplus funds was instead being used to reduce the deficit, even as Great Lakes harbors were in dire need of dredging.

The measure calls for expenditures from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund to increase each year so that by fiscal year 2025, 100% of the collections go to operation and maintenance activities across the U.S. — but only if congressional appropriators agree to increase the Army Corps of Engineers’ civil works budget.

Under the agreement, 10% of funds would be allocated to address the maintenance and dredging needs of smaller harbors, with the rest going to high- and moderate-use harbors; and a total of 10% of any increase in funding in any year compared to fiscal 2012 would be dedicated to Great Lakes projects.

Another section of the legislation also requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Army Corps of Engineers, National Park Service and U.S. Geological Survey, to help slow the spread of so-called Asian carp by providing technical assistance, coordination and support to state and local governments. The Corps would be authorized to modify existing projects to keep Asian carp out of the Great Lakes.