



Testimony to the United States Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
and
Subcommittee on Water and Wildlife
“Legislative Approaches to Protecting, Preserving and Restoring Great Water Bodies”
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Good morning, Chairman Boxer and Ranking Member Inhofe, Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Crapo, Committee and Subcommittee members. I am David Naftzger, Executive Director of the Council of Great Lakes Governors. The Council of Great Lakes Governors is a non-partisan partnership of Governors from each of the eight Great Lakes States--Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Through the Council, the Governors and the Premiers from Ontario and Québec work together to promote our economy and advance our region’s environmental health.

I would like to particularly recognize Senator Levin and Senator Voinovich, Senate Co-Chairs of the Congressional Great Lakes Task Force, for their leadership in protecting and restoring our Great Lakes. In addition to Senator Voinovich, I would also like to recognize the other Great Lakes delegation members on the Committee--Senators Klobuchar, Gillibrand and Specter. We appreciate our continued partnership with Congress and thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Our Shared Challenge

Since adoption of the federal Clean Water Act in 1972, our nation has made tremendous progress in cleaning up our waters and protecting the fish and wildlife that depend on them. National programs have provided a framework for ecosystem protection and critical funding. State, municipal and Tribal efforts have similarly been instrumental in addressing regional or more local issues.

We have experienced a good deal of success. We have solved some of our worst pollution problems. We have brought species like the bald eagle back from the brink. We have protected vast swathes of land and put them into permanent public ownership. And, we have again made our waters attractive resources that can support healthy environments and power our economies.

Unfortunately, our success is incomplete and our waters remain vulnerable. Algal blooms have increased in intensity over the last several years. New problems have emerged like the introduction of destructive invasive species such as the Asian Carp, the Zebra Mussel and Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS). Problems we thought that we had solved, like the oxygen-free

“deadzones” in Lake Erie, have reappeared. And, we struggle to deal with issues like climate change—not knowing exactly what it may mean for our aquatic ecosystems. Some in the scientific community have even described the Great Lakes as nearing an ecological tipping point beyond which damage may be irreversible.

It is clear that yesterday’s tools are not well suited to tackle today’s challenges. And, even when we have the right tools, too frequently we lack the resources to use them effectively. As a result, our environment suffers, our economy suffers and we suffer.

The Great Lakes in Perspective

The Great Lakes are a unique treasure of international significance. They contain approximately 20% of the world’s surface freshwater, and 95% of North America’s. One in three Canadians and one in 10 U.S. residents depend on the Great Lakes for their water. More than 35 million U.S. residents and 8 million Canadians live, work, and recreate in, on or by the waters of the Great Lakes Basin.

The Great Lakes regional economy and, indeed, our nation’s depend on the Great Lakes. For example, the Great Lakes provide water for 70 percent of U.S. steel production. The lakes provide transport for almost 200 million tons of international and interlake cargo. Water is also used for hydro-power on both sides of the border. Overall, the region generates nearly 30% of our nation’s gross domestic product and about 60% of all U.S. manufacturing.

The Great Lakes are shared by two nations—the United States and Canada; eight States—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New York, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin; the Canadian Provinces of Ontario and Québec; thousands of municipal governments; and, a large number of Tribes and First Nations. Of course, each government has its own jurisdiction, strengths and weaknesses in dealing with issues related to the Great Lakes. This has its benefits but clearly presents challenges in terms of coordination.

Protecting and Restoring Our Great Lakes

The Great Lakes States have a long-standing and sustained commitment to protecting and restoring our Great Lakes. The States continue to invest heavily and manage many different programs toward this objective. In recent years, the Governors successfully developed the Great Lakes—St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact and now serve on its Council. Congressional support for this effort is recognized and appreciated. Separately, several of the States have developed protection and restoration plans and they continue to work with one another, and with other governments, toward shared goals.

Our region boasts a number of organizations to help coordinate our efforts. In addition to the Council of Great Lakes Governors who I represent, the Great Lakes Commission is an advisory commission that works on behalf of the States on various issues. The International Joint Commission, an independent U.S.-Canadian organization created by the federal governments helps prevent and resolve disputes relating to the use and quality of boundary waters. The Great Lakes Fishery Commission coordinates fisheries research, controls the invasive sea lamprey and facilitates cooperative fishery management among various management agencies. Of course, each of the federal agencies such as NOAA, USGS, the Army Corps of Engineers and USDA also have programs that in one way or another address Great Lakes restoration and protection.

Because of this complexity, many different structures have been created to try to improve how we coordinate our efforts across different levels of government. For example, the Binational Executive Committee coordinates U.S.-Canadian cooperation related to the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and involves the States, local governments and other partners. More recently, the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration and its Executive Committee were created.

Despite these efforts, the job of protecting and restoring the Great Lakes remains incomplete. We, like all of you, demand better. Fortunately, recent work has created an historic opportunity.

Accelerating Our Progress

In 2003, at the request of Congress, the Great Lakes Governors developed nine priorities to protect and restore the Great Lakes:

- using water resources sustainably;
- protecting human health;
- controlling pollution from diffuse sources;
- reducing persistent bio-accumulative toxics;
- stopping the introduction and spread of non-native aquatic invasive species;
- protecting coastal wetland and wildlife habitats;
- restoring the most contaminated toxic hot spots;
- improving information collection and dissemination;
- and adopting practices that protect the environment along with the recreational and commercial value of the Great Lakes.

In 2004, the President issued an executive order recognizing the Great Lakes as a “national treasure;” creating a federal Great Lakes Interagency Task Force that was supposed to “Work to coordinate government action associated with the Great Lakes system”; and, called for a regional collaboration of national significance on behalf of the Great Lakes. This began an unprecedented effort to develop a comprehensive restoration strategy—the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC).

Over the course of about a year, more than 1,500 representatives of government, stakeholder groups and citizens joined together to create a comprehensive restoration strategy that was released in 2005. We celebrated the promise of this consensus strategy and began working toward securing the nearly \$20 billion in funding that would be needed to fulfill this promise.

During the past several years, we have made progress toward our shared vision. The States continue their significant investments as do other partners. Most recently, we have accelerated our work with the support of President Obama’s Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Through this unprecedented program, \$475 million was provided in FY2010 for Great Lakes restoration and protection, and the President has requested \$300 million for FY2011. Beyond this funding, we appreciate greater federal support that has been provided in recent years for national programs like the Clean Water Act State Revolving Fund. We look forward to continuing to work with Congress to deliver this critical funding, and to sustain it for the future.

In sum, our region has protection and restoration priorities that we all agree on; a consensus strategy; and significant and recent progress to build on. But, if we are to achieve our goals, we must redouble our efforts. Broadly, and across many programs, a large and sustained federal investment in the Great Lakes is needed. And, we must coordinate our work more effectively.

A Brighter Future

Clearly, the Great Lakes are unique and require distinct management structures. To be most successful, any future Great Lakes restoration program must encompass several overarching principles:

- Ensure that all funded activities help implement the GLRC restoration and protection strategy.
- Coordinate the efforts of the many government and non-governmental entities involved in protection and restoration activities. Recognize the leadership role of the Great Lakes Governors in defining State and regional priorities.
- Minimize bureaucracy and allow efforts to be directed toward protection and restoration rather than toward process and paperwork. To the greatest extent possible, funding should be distributed via block grants or otherwise coordinated into large grants to States so that monies can be centrally managed and directed to the various agencies and entities receiving funding within the State.
- Adopt alternatives to non-federal match requirements, with the flexibility to recognize ongoing and significant investments by States, other governments and stakeholders in Great Lakes protection and restoration.

Over the past several months, we have worked collaboratively with representatives from Congress, local and Tribal governments, and non-governmental organizations to develop a framework embodying these principles. In particular, we appreciate the leadership of Senator Levin and Senator Voinovich in these discussions. The Great Lakes Governors are eager to continue to work in partnership to develop joint proposals in order to maximize outcomes on the ground and in the water.

Conclusion

In coming months, we look forward to working with you toward our shared goals--a revitalized natural environment and reinvigorated economic assets that can power us into the future just as they powered our past. A more sustainable and brighter future awaits us.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. Should there be questions, I would be happy to try to answer them now, or please do not hesitate to contact me, David Naftzger, Executive Director of the Council of Great Lakes Governors at 35 E. Wacker Drive, Suite 1850, Chicago, Illinois, 60601; Phone (312) 407-0177; E-mail dnaftzger@cglg.org.