



Great Lakes Regional Collaboration: *Recommendations for restoring and protecting the Great Lakes ecosystem*



In May 2004, U.S. President George W. Bush, responding to state and federal restoration initiatives, signed an Executive Order calling the Great Lakes a “national treasure” and directing the federal government to work with the region’s leaders to create a Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) to address significant challenges that have arisen from past and current environmental impacts to the Great Lakes. The Collaboration is a unique partnership of Great Lakes stakeholders, key members from the federal government, eight states, and the numerous tribal authorities, regional binational agencies and municipal governments that share policymaking and management authority over Great Lakes basin. Representatives of Canadian federal and provincial governments also participated as observers. Launched in December 2004, the GLRC was charged with developing a strategic plan for the region that would build upon the extensive regional efforts to date, working together toward a common goal of restoring and protecting the Great Lakes ecosystem for this and future generations.

More than 1,500 people - representing federal, state, local and tribal governments; nongovernmental entities; and private citizens - participated on eight issue-specific strategy teams to develop this strategic plan. On Dec. 12, 2005, the final Great Lakes Strategy was released.

Strategy Team Recommendations

The GLRC Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes includes eight sections, each of which corresponds to a priority identified by the Council of Great Lakes Governors. (A ninth priority focusing on Great Lakes water management, is being addressed separately through the Annex 2001 Implementing Agreements under the leadership of the Great Lakes states and provinces.) Each section was developed by a strategy team that characterized the problems faced in the Great Lakes, established goals and mile-

stones, and made recommendations for actions that focus on the steps needed over the next five years to achieve the greatest results for Great Lakes restoration.

The strategy teams considered the overarching issues of human health, tribal interests and perspectives, and research, and factored them in to the extent possible. The actions identified by the strategy teams address only the highest priorities recommended for early implementation – much more will need to be done to fully restore and protect the Great Lakes.

This was a collaborative process that engendered a new spirit of shared responsibility and optimism. Most importantly, the Regional Collaboration has rallied around a shared vision of a restored, sustainable Great Lakes ecosystem. It has reaffirmed a number of important underlying principles to guide not only decisionmakers as they move forward in implementing key actions, but also every Great Lakes citizen as they carry out everyday activities.

While the Strategy is a best effort to identify some means of moving closer to that shared vision, the Regional Collaboration recognizes that it cannot possibly identify every action or funding avenue that will help achieve the desired end. The members of the Regional Collaboration hope that those whose activities impact the Great Lakes basin will use the Strategy as a benchmark to guide their decisions in a way that supports the ultimate shared vision. The Strategy will succeed only if it is fully utilized in a dynamic, adaptive fashion to leverage even more and greater opportunities to protect and restore this national treasure.

The key recommendations crafted by each strategy team are set forth below. Additional actions, as well as supplemental information, are included in the appendices to the Strategy, which are available online at www.glr.us.

Great Lakes Regional Collaboration



Full text of the report is available at
www.glr.us

Aquatic Invasive Species

Immediate action to stop the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) can prevent significant ecological and economic damage to the Great Lakes. The steps needed to do this include:

- ◆ Prevention of AIS introductions by ships through ballast water and other means;
- ◆ Stopping invasions of species through canals and waterways;
- ◆ Restricting trade in live organisms;
- ◆ Passage of comprehensive federal AIS legislation;
- ◆ Establishing a program for rapid response and management; and
- ◆ Education and outreach on AIS introduction and prevention.

Habitat/Species

The plants and animals of the Great Lakes region need habitat to survive in the future, and there is a need for significantly more habitat conservation and species management. The strategy team recommendations focus on:

- ◆ Native fish communities in open waters and near-shore habitats;
- ◆ Wetlands;
- ◆ Riparian (streams) habitats in tributaries to the Great Lakes; and
- ◆ Coastal shore and upland habitats.

Coastal Health

The near-shore waters and the coastal areas are the region's largest source of drinking water and support a variety of recreational activities. To minimize the risk to human health resulting from contact with near-shore waters, needed actions include:

- ◆ Major improvements in wet weather discharge controls from combined and sanitary sewers;
- ◆ Identification and control of releases from indirect sources of contamination;



- ◆ Implementation of a “risk-based approach” to manage recreational water;
- ◆ Protection of drinking water sources; and
- ◆ Improvements to drinking water infrastructure and support for source water protections.

AOC/Sediments

The United States identified the 31 most contaminated U.S. and transborder locations on the Great Lakes under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement with Canada nearly 20 years ago. None of them have been fully restored to date. To remedy this situation, a dramatic acceleration of the cleanup process at these areas of concern (AOC) is needed. The actions recommended by the strategy team are to:

- ◆ Amend the Great Lakes Legacy Act to increase funding and streamline the cleanup process;
- ◆ Improve federal, state and local capacity to manage the AOC cleanups;
- ◆ Create a federal-state AOC coordinating committee to work with local and tribal interests to speed cleanups; and
- ◆ Promote clean treatment and disposal technologies as well as better beneficial use and disposal options.

Nonpoint Source

Nonpoint sources of pollution contribute significantly to problems in the Areas of Concern, as well as to other locations in the Great Lakes, including the open waters. Actions needed to address these problems include:

- ◆ Restoration of wetlands;
- ◆ Restoration of buffer strips;
- ◆ Improvement of cropland soil management;
- ◆ Implementation of comprehensive nutrient and manure management plans for livestock operations; and
- ◆ Improvements to the hydrology in watersheds.

Toxic Pollutants

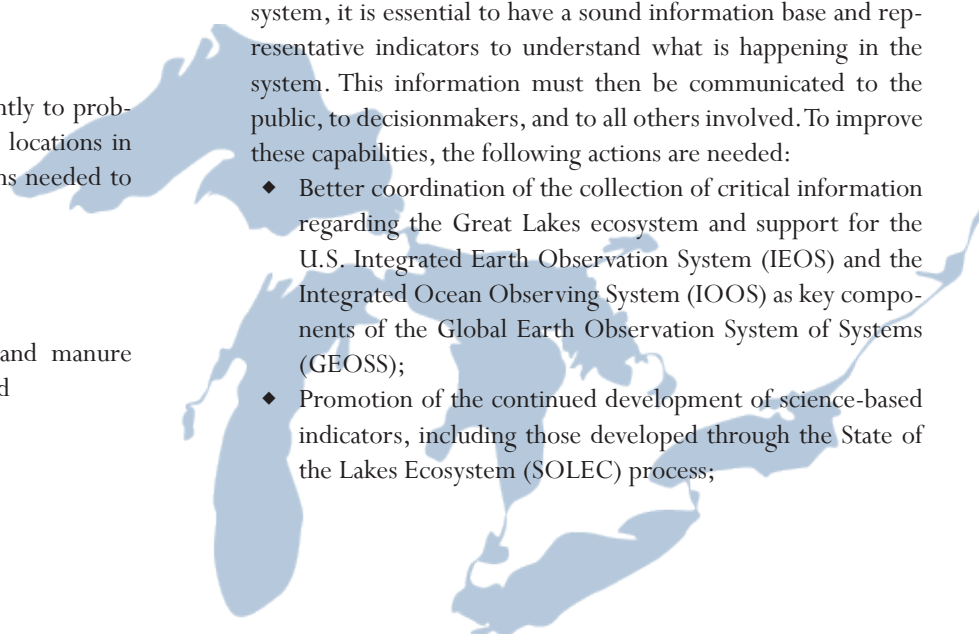
Toxic pollutants continue to stress the Great Lakes ecosystem, posing threats to human and wildlife health. Persistent toxic substances such as mercury and PCBs remain present in fish at levels that warrant advisories and restrict consumption throughout the Great Lakes basin. To address this ongoing problem, actions are needed to:

- ◆ Reduce and virtually eliminate the discharge of mercury, PCBs, dioxins, pesticides and other toxic substances to the Great Lakes;
- ◆ Prevent new toxic substances from entering the Great Lakes;
- ◆ Institute a comprehensive research, surveillance and forecasting capability;
- ◆ Create consistent, accessible basin-wide messages on fish consumption and toxic reduction methods and choices; and
- ◆ Support efforts to reduce continental and global sources of toxics to the Great Lakes.

Indicators and Information

With a resource as large and complex as the Great Lakes ecosystem, it is essential to have a sound information base and representative indicators to understand what is happening in the system. This information must then be communicated to the public, to decisionmakers, and to all others involved. To improve these capabilities, the following actions are needed:

- ◆ Better coordination of the collection of critical information regarding the Great Lakes ecosystem and support for the U.S. Integrated Earth Observation System (IEOS) and the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) as key components of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS);
- ◆ Promotion of the continued development of science-based indicators, including those developed through the State of the Lakes Ecosystem (SOLEC) process;





- ◆ Doubling of the funding for Great Lakes research over the next five years;
- ◆ Establishment of a regional information management infrastructure; and
- ◆ Creation of a Great Lakes communications work group to manage scientific and technical information.

Sustainable Development

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of Great Lakes resources will require a number of significant changes in the way we approach such things as land use, agriculture and forestry, transportation, industrial activity, and many others. To start this process, we need to:

- ◆ Adapt and maintain programs that promote sustainability across all sectors;
- ◆ Align governance to enhance sustainable planning and management of resources;
- ◆ Build outreach that brands the Great Lakes as an exceptional and competitive place to live, work, invest and play; and
- ◆ Provide leadership for sustainable development through implementation of the Strategy recommendations.

Photo credits:

Page 1: Put-in-Bay, Ohio, K. Haverkamp

Page 2: Glen Lake, Mich., S. McKendall

Final Report Cover, U.S. EPA

Page 3: Photo of entire Conveners group, including federal government and tribal representatives, Great Lakes governors, mayors, and other officials in attendance at the Dec. 3, 2004 Regional Collaboration Conveners meeting in Chicago.

Page 4: Petoskey, Mich., Michigan Travel Bureau

The Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration

This special supplement to the Great Lakes Commission 2005 Annual Report is published as a service to the region in order to raise awareness of and build support for the strategy recommendations of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration. The Great Lakes Commission played a number of supporting roles with the GLRC and in the development of the Great Lakes Strategy. Commissioners or staff co-chaired four of the eight strategy teams, and Commission staff participated on all eight, providing technical support, and drafting and reviewing language, among other roles. The Commission also developed and operated, on behalf of U.S. EPA, the GLRC web site – where the draft and final reports were posted and public comments accepted – as well as a series of online discussion forums for the use of the eight strategy teams.

GLRC Strategy Teams with co-chairs affiliated with the Great Lakes Commission were: 1) Aquatic Invasive Species – Commissioner Ken DeBeaussaert, director, Office of the Great Lakes, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality; 2) Coastal Health – Alternate Commissioner Don Zelazny, Great Lakes program coordinator, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation; 3) Areas of Concern – Commissioner Joe Koncelik, director, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency; and 4) Indicators and Information – Roger Gauthier, manager, Great Lakes Commission Data and Information Management Program.

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