

**Report of the President/CEO
Great Lakes Commission
2004 Annual Meeting
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Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to present the report of the President/CEO, which will capture a few of the highlights of activities and accomplishments since the Commission last met in Cleveland five months ago. I'll do that in just 20 minutes or so, but I'll also refer you to various sections in the briefing book designed to provide a considerable amount of background information.

More specifically, I'll be highlighting a few details about our meeting focus and format and about ongoing efforts in developing a Five Year Strategic Plan, an update of a document Commissioners approved in 2000. I will also provide an overview of initiatives and accomplishments since this past May, and conclude with an administrative update and closing observations.

By way of preface, I'd like to personally welcome the several new Commissioners, Alternates and Observers that have been appointed in recent months: several are attending their first meeting in that capacity. It's also a pleasure to see so many representatives of partner agencies and organizations in the audience.

A brief note on our meeting focus and format is in order because it is a departure, in some ways, from our established format. Our theme is "Celebrating the Past, Preparing for the Future!" And, as our chairman noted, this is a most appropriate theme for an organization whose 50th anniversary is rapidly approaching. This is a meeting where formal presentations have been kept to a relative minimum, and a special emphasis has been given to dialogue between and among Commissioners and our Observer agencies.

Through that dialogue, it is hoped that, by the end of the day, we'll be in a position to 1) identify areas of organizational strength that we can build upon; 2) identify near and longer term priorities that can be incorporated into our Strategic Plan and specific tasks; 3) identify opportunities for individual Commissioners – particularly newer members – to more fully engage in Commission priority setting and related activities; and 4) identify opportunities to fine-tune advocacy efforts to maximize impact in advancing member interests.

With respect to Strategic Plan development, I encourage everyone to very carefully review Attachment #1 in the "Action" Section of your briefing book.

Last year, Commission members decided to undertake a "mid-course" assessment of the Five Year Strategic Plan they adopted in 2000. The intent was to review progress and also identify other areas of potential activity, consistent with the Great Lakes Basin Compact, where the membership believed the Commission could assume leadership or otherwise add value. This exercise, coupled with broader input, yielded a revised draft that is presented in Attachment #1A of the "Action" section. The membership agreed, at the last meeting, to use this draft as a basis for further review and prospective refinement leading up to adoption at our semiannual meeting next spring. To assist in that effort and, at the request of the Commission, a "response" column was added in the attachment as a means to update the reader on how these draft elements are being – or could be implemented. Complementing this is Attachment #1B which presents – also at the request of the membership – a descriptive inventory of all major program and project activities underway at this time in six major program areas. Each entry including a title; statements of objective and

methodology; and intended outcomes. Significantly, every entry also identifies one or more provisions in the Great Lakes Basin Compact, draft Strategic Plan and/or related Commission policy statement that the activity addresses. This demonstrated how these numerous activities respond to Commission priorities.

Both of these documents, along with the program updates our senior managers have provided in Attachment #1 of the "Information" section, should be of great assistance to you today during the open dialogue sessions.

The latter updates also offer additional detail on the next segment of my presentation, which addresses selected initiatives and accomplishments over the last five months in response to Commission member priorities and associated policy actions. I have selected, for illustrative purposes, three initiatives for each of six program areas.

In Resource Management, the last few months have seen the completion of a major, 18 month study that yielded a "Tool Kit for Water Conservation." Supported by the Great Lakes Protection Fund, and involving follow-up work to our decision support study in support of Annex 2001, the project yielded a water conservation briefing paper, case studies of best practices within the region; assessments of best practices technologies in other regions; and an online directory of water conservation tools, data and information. The latter offers over 150 Internet resources that have been compiled and organized under topical categories.

In recent weeks, our Great Lakes Biohydrological Information System Inventory has been completed. The study directive came from the Congress via the Water Resources Development Act, and the funds were routed through the Corps of Engineers. The inventory and assessment effort, also relevant to Annex 2001 implementation and broader applications, is the most comprehensive of its kind undertaken to date. It covers items such as groundwater and surface water hydrology; tributary flows; meteorological data; land cover and land use data; and biological implications of water withdrawals and uses. The inventory is massive (some 640 pages plus appendices), but is succinctly presented in an executive summary. Five implementation scenarios for addressing unmet needs are presented in detail and costed out. I have a copy available for review by interested parties.

Finally, I note an important upcoming event the Great Lakes Commission is planning in cooperation with many partners and with EPA funding support. Twenty seven years ago, a major study by the International Joint Commission established a link between land use and water quality and, in so doing, resulted in a major regional focus on nonpoint source pollution control that has yielded substantial restoration and protection benefits. We – and our partners – will be reviewing programs over this period and examining opportunities for a future agenda for land use management and nonpoint source pollution control. This meeting will take place next month, in fact.

Activities in Environmental Quality over the last few months featured a July workshop on restoration planning for fish and wildlife in designated Areas of Concern. Funded by EPA, the workshop in Monroe, Michigan assessed the status of restoration efforts and outlined a process for setting and achieving restoration targets for three beneficial use improvements: degradation of fish and wildlife populations; loss of fish and wildlife habitat; and degradation of benthic organisms. Proceedings are forthcoming.

On another initiative, a binational team associated with our Great Lakes Coastal Wetlands Consortium has merged coastal wetlands inventories, yielding a single, seamless product – the first unified and classified data set of its kind in the region. This and related work will be featured in one of the technical sessions at the SOLEC conference this week.

We are also in the later stages of a Joyce Foundation supported initiative designed to create awareness of, and access to basinwide environmental monitoring programs and data. This is a key element of decision support

systems that cuts across many topical areas. This effort has entailed development of a binational inventory of monitoring programs; data collection from all levels of government; a gap analysis and report; a needs assessment; and a preliminary web interface design. Completion is set for the majority of this work in the final quarter of calendar year 2004.

Our Transportation and Sustainable Development program focuses on the interface of environmental protection and economic development goals, with sustainability as central guiding theme. The last few months saw considerable progress in developing a Coastal Habitat Restoration and Conservation Plan for Lake St. Clair, a NOAA-funded initiative that responds to multiple commission priorities. An extensive network of project partners has been involved, with the Michigan National Features Inventory playing a particularly key role. The draft plan – reflecting internal and external review – has been completed.

I am also pleased to announce the recent release of two new technical reports that help address the environmental and economic dimensions of dredging. The first report is titled, “Testing and Evaluation of Dredged Material for Upland Beneficial Uses” and it provides a regional framework and set of procedures for all levels of government. A companion piece is an annotated bibliography of more than 200 references. This is a product called for by the Great Lakes Dredging Team and was supported by EPA. Copies are available for your review.

And, just recently, a draft study of the economic benefits associated with recreational boating was completed – also a WRDA initiative authorized by Congress and funded through the Corps. Through intensive research regional and national surveys and economic modeling, the study is yielding new data and information that should provide compelling arguments for enhanced federal focus on the operation and maintenance of recreational harbors in the Great Lakes. The study documents an average of \$9.9 billion annually in boater trip spending with 107,000 jobs tied directly to the industry. Other findings include itemization of individual boat owner expenses daily and per year; updated number of registered watercraft; number of boat slips; and economic details on the charter boat, marina and boat manufacturing sectors, among others; as well as details on dredging and harbor maintenance.

Communications and Internet Technology, of course, is the engine that drives so much research and decisionmaking activity in the binational Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region.

Thanks to a partnership with NOAA’s Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services, we continue to disseminate monitoring, research and related data and information via the Great Lakes Information Network. In addition to enhancing access to current lake conditions, we’ll also be doing some “lower tech” yet equally important work, such as designing a Great Lakes water levels display at the Soo Locks Visitor Center to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the locks.

Many of you will recall the Commission’s Great Lakes Circle Tour initiative of the early 90’s, – an initiative that resulted in our green and white “circle tour” highway signs being strategically located throughout the 7,500 mile driving route. The online version of the tour, which allows prospective tourists to access maps and Internet links to major points of interest attracts 200,000 visitors every month. This is significant for tourism promotion and the opportunity to advance general information/education is tremendous.

Finally, the Commission and its many partners will be hosting, later this month in Detroit, the Great Lakes Regional Data Exchange Conference. Responding to a well established regional priority, it is geared toward federal, state, provincial and academic information technology professionals and data users, and is designed to promote consistency in data and integrated and interoperable regional information systems. Details are in your briefing book and on the display table.

Also, I note that the Province of Ontario has been selected as the GLIN “site of the month” for October.

With respect to our Data and Information Management efforts, recent weeks have seen drafting of a business plan for a Great Lakes Observing System. It proposes the framework for a Great Lakes Regional Association; one of 11 elements of a network of integrated coastal area observing systems. Such a system is called for in the President's May 18 Executive Order, and is also addressed in the Ocean Commission report. Once formed, this association will help develop regional and national policies and practices, data coordination efforts and the development of new data resources and products. Nineteen agencies and organizations have partnered in the development of the business plan, which was supported by NOAA's Coastal Services Center.

Early next year, the latest inventory of air toxic emissions in the Great Lakes will be released, covering 213 individual pollutants emitted by 674 source categories and almost 1600 difference processes. Also, we are soon to release a new online resource that will provide the public – as well as researchers – with easy access to this data in various forms including mapped display. Finally, our long standing work on spill prevention and response has seen some recent products, including a Net Environmental Benefit Analysis report prepared with a larger binational team, and data compilation and atlas production for the entire region. We are also in the early stages of a federal/state partnership for a Spill of National Significance drill in FY '07. We will help define the venue for the exercise, identify the players, develop scenarios and establish a training schedule. This is required under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 and is designed to simulate an event of Exxon Valdez magnitude.

Regional Coordination work is all about advancing member interests relative to laws, policies, programs and appropriations. Recent workshops in Green Bay and Milwaukee saw the conclusion of a workshop series sponsored with various Sea Grant programs and the Council of Great Lakes Governors. Some 700 stakeholders convened to share their perspectives on the governor's priorities and associated implementation opportunities. About half the proceedings have been approved and published; the balance will be completed in the next few weeks.

The third and final element of the John Glenn Great Lakes Basin Program entailed a study examining current and prospective Corps authorities associated with Great Lakes use, management and protection. The study, just completed, also entailed a much broader look at federal agency roles and relationships, a timely examination in light of enhanced interest in this area.

And, finally, advocacy activities centered around the various elements of the legislative and appropriations priorities adopted by the membership earlier this year. Most recently, efforts have focused on Great Lakes Legacy Act funding; the Great Lakes Water Level Observation Network; and the Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control – all elements of that statement. And, last month, we worked with the Great Lakes Task Force in sponsoring a Congressional Staff Briefing on regional monitoring needs, with a special focus on the potential for the Great Lakes Observing System.

This selective review of ongoing activities in response to Commission priorities is complemented by some more recent developments. For example, the Commission's long standing collaboration with NOAA's Coastal Services Center is being enhanced through a joint project agreement that will strengthen federal/state cooperation on a range of data and information management and coordination activities. In partnership with the Huron River Watershed Council, we will help implement the Michigan Clean Water Corps, an initiative of Governor Granholm featuring a citizen-based volunteer monitoring network. And, a number of program and project renewals have taken place in recent weeks to maintain the momentum on current priorities.

On the financial and administrative front, in recent months the Board of Directors has approved the fiscal year 2005 budget, and we have already begin to look to the out years with regard to current and prospective initiatives associated with the Compact and draft Strategic Plan. Also, three important initiatives are underway internally. A refined Quality Management Plan to ensure the highest possible standards for

handling primary and secondary data; an Operations Manual to further formalize procedures; and an updated work plan to fully characterized current activities, such as those identified in one of the briefing book attachments.

In closing, we continue to place an emphasis on baseline functions and value-added activities consistent with our Compact and Strategic Plan. We look to our membership – and valued Observer agencies – for guidance and direction in developing near and long-term priorities. We continue to pursue a strong and vibrant suite of programs and projects that respond to member priorities and provide a foundation for the future. And, as always, flexibility is a built-in institutional feature, recognizing that member priorities do change, and we need to “expect the unexpected” and accommodate quick turnaround requests as they arise.

This complete my report and, in closing, recognized the fine leadership and technical skills of the staff that works for you. Present today are Tom Crane, Dave Knight, Victoria Pebbles, Christine Manninen, Roger Gauthier, Shannon Glutting, Ric Lawson, Pat Gable, John MacDonagh-Dumler and Ted Lawrence. I encourage you all to introduce yourself to them, if you haven’t already. We are to assist you and putting names and faces together is always helpful.

Thank you.