

REGIONAL COORDINATION

Goal: *To strengthen the collective Great Lakes management effort by providing regional leadership, generating consensus on regional priorities among diverse interests, and building partnerships for decisive regional action.*

Selected highlights

Provided a unified, leading voice on Great Lakes-St. Lawrence issues, needs and priorities • Secured U.S. federal funds and programs by developing and advocating legislative and appropriations priorities • Forged regional consensus on pressing issues through government/private sector/citizen group dialogue • Brought the expertise of more than 400 regional scientists, managers and policymakers to bear on priority issues • Expanded provincial partnerships and initiated partnerships with First Nations/tribal authorities • Served as the region's leading source for objective, applied policy research on key issues

Advocating the region's interests

The Commission took full advantage of its unique advocacy mandate in 2000, formulating a 34-point policy statement to guide Congress on legislative and funding priorities for federally supported research and management institutions, resource management and environmental protection programs, and maritime transportation and other sustainable development matters. The Commission also communicated via targeted correspondence and extensive interaction with member offices. Through its priorities, the Commission ensured that tens of millions of dollars were directed to the region in continuing and new-start initiatives.

"We have an obligation to provide a unified and influential voice on legislation, policy and appropriations that affect our region."

— Irene Brooks, immediate past chair, Great Lakes Commission

Making every day Great Lakes Day in Washington

A receptive "standing room only" crowd was on hand as the Commission released its 2000 priorities statement at the annual Great Lakes Day in Washington. Keynoted by Sen. Herb Kohl (Wis.) and Rep. Vern Ehlers (Mich.), the event attracted many Great Lakes Congressional Delegation members and staff and leading U.S. and Canadian officials, including directors of more than two dozen federal, state and regional agencies. A subsequent issues briefing featured U.S. and Canadian presentations emphasizing federal interest in the lakes and actions needed to address problems ranging from Areas of Concern cleanup to aquatic nuisance species prevention and control. These events set the theme for advocacy efforts throughout the duration of the 106th Congress.

Looking beyond our boundaries

The Commission pioneered the notion of management by hydrologic rather than geopolitical boundaries; it has never recognized the mythical “dotted line” down the middle of the lakes. It took this notion a step further last year as the Commission reached across regional boundaries to advance its vision and support of sound water resources policy. For example, the Commission teamed up with regional organizations through the Interstate Council on Water Policy to strengthen Washington’s understanding of state and regional needs. It also formed alliances to strengthen individual and collective approaches to issues such as aquatic nuisance species prevention and control. Commission expertise on regional governance was widely sought, resulting in visits with delegates from the Baltic states, Africa, the Gulf of Maine and South America, among others. And, where necessary, the Commission didn’t hesitate to oppose ill-advised federal legislation directed at other regions (e.g., Dakota Water Resources Act) that would have an adverse impact on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region.

Educating and motivating our constituents

Ensuring effective public policy relies as much on publicity and promotion as it does on thorough and objective research and analysis. The Commission acted accordingly, with staff sponsoring, speaking at or otherwise participating in more than 200 events that advanced organizational goals. This, and other conventional means of communication, were complemented by the electronic communication capabilities for which the Commission has received global recognition. Over the past year, Great Lakes Information Network monthly hits skyrocketed to 2.8 million, and monthly hits to the Commission’s redesigned web site climbed to more than 300,000, a four-fold increase over 1999. Commissioners and staff also served on dozens of regional and national boards (e.g., International Joint Commission, National Sea Grant Review Panel, Interstate Council on Water Policy, Inter-American Water Resources Network) that served as vehicles both for formulating and advancing Commission policies and priorities.

What’s ahead in 2001

- Fine tuning congressional advocacy efforts to maximize regional success
- Consolidating and expanding advocacy through a new congressional liaison staff position
- Strengthening relationships with First Nations/tribal authorities
- Involving provinces in all relevant initiatives
- Building on past success with government/private sector/citizen partnerships
- Remaining vigilant in supporting sound legislation and opposing ill-advised legislation
- Looking within and beyond the region to advance our vision

