

Advocacy Efforts

An effective voice for our membership

The Great Lakes Commission looks out for the best interests of the region, providing its member jurisdictions with a unified, well-respected and highly influential voice on the pressing issues of the day. This voice takes many forms, ranging from expert testimony and congressional consultations to drafting legislation and lobbying for appropriations. This voice also carries in many directions, to Capitol Hill and Parliament Hill, to our state and provincial leaders, to our mayors, and to all who establish or influence policy.

“We are trying to protect 20 percent of the world’s fresh surface water.”

– Chair Sam Speck, testifying before the U.S. Senate
Committee on Environment and Public Works
Aug. 25, 2003

The centerpiece of the Commission’s advocacy efforts is its annual *Great Lakes Program to Ensure Environmental and Economic Prosperity*. This document, a descriptive listing of U.S. federal legislative and appropriations priorities, provides a blueprint for a range of advocacy efforts. It offers a vision for the Great Lakes ecosystem, accompanied by a series of priorities and specific strategic actions for achieving them.

Released annually at “Great Lakes Day in Washington” events, the *Great Lakes Program* is subsequently conveyed to the entire Great Lakes Congressional Delegation, key committee leadership, governors and state legislators, partners, and all others in a position to work together to advance shared priorities.

The origin of this comprehensive document dates back to 2000, when members of Congress urged the Commission to package its legislative and appropriations priorities around common, mutually reinforcing themes that would promote environmental and economic prosperity. The Commission membership responded with the first iteration of the *Great Lakes Program* and, in so doing, launched its campaign to “Restore the Greatness!”

The *Great Lakes Program* is built around a series of seven themes, or priorities, that collectively contribute to the restoration, protection and sustainable use of the region’s natural assets.

- Cleaning up toxic hot spots
- Shutting the door on invasive species
- Controlling nonpoint source pollution
- Restoring and conserving wetlands and critical coastal habitat
- Ensuring the sustainable use of our water resources
- Strengthening our decision support capability
- Enhancing the commercial and recreational value of our waterways

The Commission recognizes that ecosystem restoration is not a new concept for the Great Lakes, but has been under way for years. In fact, restoration programs have fueled the recovery of the lakes since they were declared “dead or dying” just a few decades ago.

But progress has been slow and uneven, characterized by fits and starts. It has been piecemeal and largely crisis-oriented, a “Band-Aid” approach that responds to individual ailments rather than a comprehensive regimen that restores – and maintains – the health of the entire system.



Building upon a multitude of existing federally authorized programs – as well as new-start initiatives – the Commission has made its plea to “Restore the Greatness!” This has featured a call for federal legislation that ties a comprehensive planning process to large-

scale, multiyear appropriations to address restoration and protection priorities. In 2003, Commission members and staff worked closely with congressional offices to begin shaping such an initiative. Over that time, the Commission also supported the Council of Great Lakes Governors and partnered with a multitude of other agencies and organizations as regional interest in a restoration initiative gained momentum.

The centerpiece of the Commission’s advocacy efforts is its annual Great Lakes Program to Ensure Environmental and Economic Prosperity.

Translating priorities to action took on many forms in 2003. For example:

- Chair Sam Speck testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, speaking to the importance of state leadership in water resource management decisions
- Board member Frank Kudrna testified before the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, calling for full recognition of the Great Lakes and other freshwater resources in national policy
- President/CEO Mike Donahue provided testimony to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, urging that the *Great Lakes Program* be used as a basis for developing a comprehensive Great Lakes ecosystem restoration initiative

In addition to these advocacy efforts, the Commission also:

- Urged the U.S. and Canadian governments to undertake a comprehensive review of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement in light of current restoration priorities and unmet needs
- Lobbied for provisions that advance resource management and sustainable economic goals under the John Glenn Great Lakes Basin Program of the Water Resources Development Act of 1999
- Joined with many parties to press for passage of the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act
- Lobbied for additional federal funds to support restoration efforts in Great Lakes Areas of Concern under the Great Lakes Legacy Act

Advancing Our Priorities

restore

The *Great Lakes Program to Ensure Environmental and Economic Prosperity* is a blueprint for advocacy, but it is also much more. In 2003, the Great Lakes Commission engaged in dozens of projects that advanced *Great Lakes Program* priorities, a clear demonstration that the Commission and its member states are ready and willing to meet their obligations in a shared federal/state initiative. The following pages highlight just a few of the initiatives that the Commission – and its many valued partners – undertook in 2003 to “Restore the Greatness!”

Cleaning up toxic hot spots



toxic

Contaminated sediments are a persistent source of toxic pollution to the Great Lakes at each of the 31 U.S. and binational Areas of Concern (AOCs). They contribute to numerous beneficial use impairments in the AOCs, including fish consumption advisories, beach closures, and restrictions on dredging.

Toxins are also an obstacle to rehabilitating abandoned or decaying urban and industrial areas known as brownfields, whose redevelopment can enhance tax bases and employment, and relieve development pressures on green spaces. Research also shows that cleaning up contaminated sediments in local water bodies can increase property values by more than 40 percent.

The Great Lakes Commission has taken a leadership role in communicating funding and technical needs for cleaning up and delisting AOCs to state and federal legislators. The Commission also is assisting U.S. EPA in implementing the Great Lakes Legacy Act, which authorizes funding for cleaning up contaminated sediments in Great Lakes AOCs. Forums organized by the Commission inform stakeholders of the Act's provisions and facilitate state and local government participation in remediation efforts.

AOC restoration efforts are guided by state and local Remedial Action Plan (RAP) groups. The Commission is providing RAP practitioners with tools and methodologies for restoring beneficial uses and developing measurable targets to assess progress in meeting cleanup goals. Partners in these efforts include U.S. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO), the International Joint Commission (IJC), Michigan's Statewide Public Advisory Council (SPAC) and local RAP groups.

The Commission is providing RAP practitioners with tools and methodologies for restoring beneficial uses in Areas of Concern.

The Commission supports Michigan's SPAC in advancing cleanup efforts in that state's 14 AOCs, coordinating activities among federal, state and local participants, and identifying needed assistance. This has included project planning; outreach to state and federal legislators; administering grant support for local RAP groups; identifying research, monitoring and public outreach needs; and facilitating communication among partner agencies. The Commission also assists the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' RAP program by working with RAP participants to develop projects and secure funding.

To advance brownfields cleanup and redevelopment, and the associated protection of open spaces known as greenfields, the Commission initiated a series of state policy roundtables. These bring together senior state officials, state and federal legislative aides, and representatives of key stakeholder groups to explore strategies for redeveloping older urban areas while preserving outlying agricultural lands and open spaces.

Shutting the door on invasive species

invasive

Invasive species are a growing and potentially devastating threat to the economy and environment of the Great Lakes region. They represent a form of biological pollution that preys upon and displaces native animals and plants, reduces biodiversity, limits water use activities, and damages infrastructure. The cost of these impairments is estimated to be as high as \$5.0 billion over a 10-year period if corrective measures are not taken.

Working with the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) and other partners, the Great Lakes Commission is playing an instrumental role in facilitating and shaping efforts to mitigate the threat from invasive species. Through the Great Lakes Panel, funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Commission cultivates relationships among a wide range of interests with a stake in the issue. In so doing, Commission efforts cut across multiple jurisdictions, resulting in collaborative efforts to address the problem.

Working with the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species, the Commission is playing an instrumental role in efforts to mitigate the threat from invasive species.

Among these efforts is a pilot project to develop an early detection and monitoring system to help contain new invasions before they become established. Similarly, the Commission is assisting in the development of a regional model for rapid response planning for Great Lakes aquatic invasions. The model plan will provide resource managers with the tools needed to limit the spread of newly introduced invasive species before their populations spread beyond the point of feasible eradication and control. Both projects are funded by U.S. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO).

Ballast water discharges from oceangoing vessels are a major vector of ANS introduction. The Commission developed a position statement on ballast water practices and presented it to the U.S. Coast Guard during public hearings on ballast water discharge standards.

The Commission is also playing a key role in the development of a Geographic Information System (GIS) database model for mapping and tracking the spread of seven established invasive species populations within the state of Michigan. Funded by the Michigan Great Lakes Protection Fund, this Internet-based database will help resource managers effectively target resources to limit the further spread of these populations and serve as a model for applications elsewhere in the basin.

Education and outreach efforts are supported through a long-term grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), providing for the production of the Great Lakes Panel's quarterly newsletter, *ANS Update*, which highlights emerging policy, scientific and technical developments.



Controlling nonpoint source pollution

pollution

Nonpoint sources, including urban and agricultural runoff, and air deposition of toxic chemicals, are the leading contributors of pollutants to the Great Lakes. Hundreds of millions of tons of topsoil erode into Great Lakes waterways each year, often carrying fertilizers, pesticides and other contaminants. This runoff also clogs waterways, smothers aquatic habitats and imposes economic burdens related to dredging, water treatment, flooding and soil loss. Meanwhile, airborne deposition contributes millions of tons of pollutants each year and is the leading source of mercury to the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control is one of the Great Lakes Commission's primary vehicles for addressing nonpoint pollution. Directing nearly \$1.9 million in grants to local conservation programs in 2003, the Basin Program helps reduce soil erosion and sediment loadings to the Great Lakes, their connecting channels and tributaries. Program partners include the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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The Basin Program's primary outreach vehicle is *Keeping it On the Land*, a quarterly publication produced by the Commission. In addition, the Commission collaborated with the Michigan Sea Grant College Program to produce and distribute 8,000 copies of a full-color brochure and poster on the causes and economic and environmental costs of sedimentation.

A related initiative was the Ohio Watershed Management Training Project. A joint effort of the Commission and the Ohio EPA, the project provided technical assistance, outreach training and education for local watershed groups.

The Great Lakes Tributary Modeling Program contributes to the understanding of sedimentation through the development and application of sediment transport models in priority Great Lakes tributaries. Coordinated by the Corps of Engineers, computer models were completed in 2003 for the Little Calumet, Cuyahoga, Sandusky and Grand river watersheds.

As part of its efforts to address air pollution and deposition, the Commission produces the annual Regional Air Toxic Emissions Inventory. This project, begun in 1987, compiles and standardizes data on point and nonpoint emissions collected by the Great Lakes states and the province of Ontario, and makes it available to researchers and policymakers.

In 2003, the Commission assumed management of the U.S. EPA's Great Lakes Air Deposition (GLAD) Program. GLAD promotes scientific research on emissions, atmospheric dispersion, deposition and ecological effects resulting from point and nonpoint sources within and outside the region. Approximately \$1.2 million in grants are to be disbursed under this program in 2004.



Restoring and conserving wetlands and critical coastal habitat

habitat

Wetlands and coastal marshes provide critical habitat for fish and wildlife, help store and cycle nutrients, prevent erosion of soil and shorelines, and provide tremendous recreational opportunities. Similarly, the loss of small streams and associated floodplains impairs critical habitat and compromises ecological and economic benefits.

Through its staff support for the Great Lakes Coastal Wetlands Consortium, the Great Lakes Commission is helping develop a basinwide coastal wetlands monitoring program. With funding from U.S. EPA, the Consortium is completing a classified wetlands inventory, evaluating remote monitoring techniques, and finalizing methodologies for reporting on key indicators of wetland health. Meetings have also begun with state and provincial officials to develop an implementation strategy.

The wetlands of the St. Clair River and Lake St. Clair are among the most biologically productive areas in the Great Lakes, of significant importance to the overall ecosystem. Working in concert with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and a broad range of partners, the Commission is leading a binational project to identify environmental stresses and develop a comprehensive management plan for these vital resources.

The Commission is leading a binational project to develop a comprehensive management plan for Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River.

Related initiatives include the development of an online inventory of Lake St. Clair monitoring programs and the identification of monitoring gaps. Working with federal, state, provincial and local authorities, this project is leading to the development of a strategic monitoring plan to meet regional needs.

The Commission is also developing a Geographic Information System (GIS) database of the lake's coastal habitats, in cooperation with NOAA, and developing decision support tools for use in a conservation and restoration plan for those habitats.

To protect against the threat of toxic spills in wetlands, coastal habitats and other susceptible areas, the Commission's Area Contingency Planning project has produced an online atlas of GIS-based maps providing a wide range of information useful to hazardous spill responders and planners. Produced in association with U.S. EPA and the U.S. Geological Survey, the Inland Sensitivity Atlas details potential spill sources, environmentally important areas, habitats of endangered and threatened species, water supplies, economically vulnerable areas, and other significant sites and features.

Dredging is an essential activity in Great Lakes harbors and shipping channels, but concerns exist over its effects on biological resources, including coastal wetlands. Working through the Great Lakes Dredging Team, the Commission is helping establish a regional process for identifying "environmental windows," times when dredging and sediment disposal activities can be conducted with minimal impact.



Ensuring the sustainable use of our water resources



resources

More than any other factor, the Great Lakes region is defined by its water resources. With the greatest abundance of freshwater on the face of the earth, its residents share in a wealth unlike any other. The waters of the Great Lakes basin support a nearly endless range of aquatic biota and wildlife, recreational opportunities, industry and agriculture, as well as the individual needs of the millions who live there.

Annex 2001 of the Great Lakes Charter establishes a framework for the protection, sustainable use and enhancement of the region's water resources. The Commission is playing a major role in Annex implementation and, over the past year, saw the completion of its Water Resources Management Decision Support System project. Supported by the Great Lakes Protection Fund, this two-year effort identified unmet needs related to Great Lakes water resources management, water use and ecological impacts.

Building upon this effort, the ongoing Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Biohydrologic Information project is developing inventories of biohydrologic data, identifying opportunities to improve the region's biohydrologic information base and assessing the federal role in managing such information. This project responds to provisions of the John Glenn Great Lakes Basin Program, authorized in the 1999 Water Resources Development Act.

Also supporting Annex 2001 implementation is the ongoing management of a Great Lakes Regional Water Use Database, which annually provides information on water withdrawals, diversions and consumptive uses. In addition, Commission staff are developing a "tool kit" for water conservation, based on an assessment of best conservation practices by regional water suppliers. The Great Lakes Protection Fund is supporting this project.

Related to these efforts, the Commission is helping develop a water resources management plan for Isle Royale National Park, categorizing the park's water resources and suggesting measures for their protection.

The Commission also assisted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in developing a draft strategic plan to address current and emerging regional needs. The study was authorized in the John Glenn Great Lakes Basin Program of the Water Resources Development Act of 1999.

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To provide a much-needed mechanism for sharing water resources information, the Commission is working with a wide range of binational partners to complete a comprehensive inventory of environmental monitoring programs in the region. The Great Lakes Basin Monitoring Inventory will take the form of a web-based searchable database that will improve coordination, collaboration and data sharing among regional entities.

A persistent problem in recent years has been Great Lakes beach closings prompted by high bacteria counts. The Commission-developed BeachCast program provides beach users with ready access to beach health advisories via a dedicated web site, along with information on weather, monitoring programs and more.

Strengthening our decision support capability

decision

Scientifically sound data, information and analysis provide the foundation for informed policy and resource management. The Great Lakes Commission places a premium on efforts to obtain quality data on Great Lakes indicators, facilitate regional data access and exchange, promote awareness of Great Lakes issues, and distribute Great Lakes information.

Toward this end, the Commission has assumed a lead role in the development of the Great Lakes Observing System (GLOS), which will provide real-time access to critical data. A regional node of NOAA's Integrated Ocean Observing System, GLOS will provide access to physical, chemical and biological data currently collected by multiple entities throughout the region.

GLOS will build upon the NOAA-funded "Current Lake Conditions" project, which provides Internet access to real-time information on weather, water levels, water temperatures, wave heights, boating safety and more, via the Great Lakes Information Network (GLIN). A Commission-managed Internet service, GLIN also provides daily news updates and e-communication tools, and responds annually to thousands of public inquiries regarding the region's environment, economy and related issues.

The Great Lakes Observing System (GLOS) will provide real-time access to critical Great Lakes data.

Working with the Lake Michigan Monitoring Coordination Council, the Commission is developing a coordinated tributary monitoring initiative that will gage pollutant and nutrient loads to Lake Michigan. Funding is provided by U.S. EPA – GLNPO.

The Commission assisted the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality in improving its fish contaminant trend monitoring program by facilitating a peer review assessment, convening regional experts to examine the program, and offering conclusions and recommendations.

Science vessels play an important role in Great Lakes research and monitoring efforts, collecting the raw data upon which our understanding of the lakes is based. To enhance the effectiveness of these vessels, the Commission, in partnership with the IJC and other organizations, convenes managers and crews of the Great Lakes science vessel fleet annually for training and to coordinate schedules, operations, maintenance and monitoring activities.

The Commission also is furthering regional data exchange among federal, state and provincial agencies through information management support for the IJC's Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Study. The Commission's work facilitates public input on the five-year study, which is assessing the criteria used to regulate outflows from Lake Ontario through the St. Lawrence River.



Enhancing the commercial and recreational value of our waterways

value

Great Lakes waterborne transportation is the foundation upon which our regional economy was built. To prosper, we must continue to avail ourselves of the natural assets and advantages of the system, both recreational and commercial, in a manner that respects the system's ecological integrity. The Great Lakes Commission plays a leadership role in ensuring that our waterways are used in a productive and sustainable manner.

Dredging is critical for maintaining harbors and shipping channels. However, options for disposal of dredged sediments are limited and costly. As facilitator of the Great Lakes Dredging Team, the Commission leads efforts to develop a regional framework for evaluating the suitability of dredged material for beneficial uses, including upland areas such as land reclamation, soil enrichment, construction aggregate and more.

Recreational boating is a major element of the Great Lakes economy. To assess its impact, the Commission initiated a study under the provisions of the John Glenn Great Lakes Basin Program, authorized in the 1999 Water Resources Development Act.

Maritime transportation offers advantages in fuel efficiency, safety and emissions over rail and highway modes. It also offers the potential to relieve congestion on land routes. Toward this end, the Commission participated in initiatives by the U.S. Maritime Administration and Transport

Canada to promote "short sea shipping" among Great Lakes ports as an alternative to hauling cargoes overland. In addition, the Commission initiated a study to quantify the benefits of maritime transportation compared to land-based modes.

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The Maritime Security Act of 2002 established new requirements for Great Lakes ports and operators. The Commission assisted in meeting those requirements through its participation in the Great Lakes Waterway Management Forum Subcommittee on Security. The Commission also entered into an agreement with NOAA to establish a Great Lakes ports and harbors specialist position, providing a much-expanded impact on issues affecting the maritime community and its role in environmental protection, resource management and sustainable economic activity.

The St. Lawrence Seaway has been a crucial element of the region's maritime system and overall economy since it opened in 1959. In cooperation with U.S. and Canadian transportation and environmental agencies, the Commission is assembling environmental and economic data needed for an objective assessment of the Seaway's current conditions and options for the future.

Finally, in its role as nonfederal sponsor of the Soo Locks Replacement Project, the Commission is completing a cooperative agreement for the project with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and is continuing to press for nonfederal matching fund commitments necessary to begin construction.

