



Our Changing Lakes

2007 Annual Report of the Great Lakes Commission



Great Lakes
Commission
des Grands Lacs



Our Changing Lakes

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As leaders of efforts to preserve and protect our greatest heritage and one of our nation's most precious natural resources, we find our efforts at a critical crossroads.

While we continue our work to promote a healthy and sustainable economy and restore our Great Lakes environment, our region's economy has gone through dramatic reshuffling and increased diversification in the last decade.

We've also realized that the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence basin is an ever-evolving system, physically and organically, with or without human meddling. Add in the actions of people – both actions intended to protect and restore and those with unintended negative consequences – and there will never be a time when the lakes aren't in flux.

It is incumbent upon us as Great Lakes stewards to understand and distinguish between the natural changes we cannot control, and the human-caused changes – especially those with injurious effects – that we can try to fix.

In 2007 the Great Lakes Commission responded to the challenge of our changing lakes on many fronts. Perhaps most critical was the ongoing threat of aquatic invasive species (AIS). The Commission joined with many partners to press for strong federal ballast legislation to eliminate one of the primary AIS pathways into the lakes and worked to address other AIS vectors, as well.

Overlaying many aspects of the Commission's work in 2007 was the change in global climate. We still don't fully understand all of the changes we can expect as the lakes warm. But, we know they will change and it makes sense that our region start planning to adapt.

Commission members worked feverishly to adopt a new Compact and state rules to protect against harmful diversions and better manage uses of water here within the basin. This will prepare our region as climate change leads to greater stress on freshwater resources on many parts of the planet.

Eight straight years of low water levels indicate a hydrological change in the Great Lakes that may be more profound than previously thought. The Commission worked in 2007 to ensure that IJC studies to consider water levels management are supported by rigorous science and broad consensus.

New Commission initiatives focused on the alternative energy sources being developed across our region. The Great Lakes Wind Collaborative was established to help capture the potential for energy security, jobs and economic development available to us if we can harness Great Lakes winds in an environmentally sustainable manner. We also assessed some of the less obvious unintended consequences of the ethanol boom and its potential impact on crop plantings and soil runoff. The theme of change in 2007 carried over to the Great Lakes Commission itself. We adopted a new five-year Strategic Plan reflecting the priorities of our member states and provinces. We also developed a new Work Plan to carry out those priorities over the next two years in five areas: Aquatic Ecosystems and Biodiversity; Economy and Society; Water Supply; Coastal and Terrestrial Habitat; and Water Quality.

While we are clear for now on our course for the future, we are just as certain that we will see changes in the years ahead that we can't envision today. Adapting to change must always be part of our plan.

John D. Cherry, Jr.
Chair, Great Lakes Commission

Tim A. Eder
Executive Director, Great Lakes Commission

In elementary school, we remembered the names of the lakes with the acronym HOMES: Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior... Only recently, within the past few decades, has there been wider understanding that the Lakes are homes in a deeper sense, a vast complex, and interconnected ecological system that is the natural habitat of an unimaginably large array of organisms, each so delicately dependent upon the other that whatever affects one inevitably affects the whole. And the whole includes us.

- Wayne Grady, *The Great Lakes: The Natural History of a Changing Region*

The Great Lakes Commission is a public agency established by the Great Lakes Basin Compact in 1955 to help its Member states and provinces speak with a unified voice and collectively fulfill their vision for a healthy, vibrant Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River region. Commission products and services focus on communication and education, information integration and reporting, facilitation and consensus building, and policy coordination and advocacy.

The purpose of the Commission is to carry out the terms and requirements of the Great Lakes Basin Compact, as noted in Article 1: To promote the orderly, integrated, and comprehensive development, use, and conservation of the water resources of the Great Lakes Basin.

Communication and Education

The Commission raises public awareness of ecosystem management and the links between environmental quality and economic viability. The Commission educates and empowers government, citizens and other stakeholders to effectively participate in decisions affecting the future of the region.

Information Integration and Reporting

The Commission researches, collects, organizes and makes accessible data and information about the Great Lakes that is relevant to our Members, individually and collectively, and to others in the Great Lakes region. Decisionmakers rely on data maintained by the Commission to support planning, resource management and other activities.

Facilitation and Consensus Building

The Commission convenes and leads multistakeholder forums, projects and activities on issues and ideas of importance to Member jurisdictions and others. The Commission provides forums where emerging issues and ideas are identified, leading research is presented, conflicting views are shared and debated, and consensus is built around potential solutions.

Policy Coordination and Advocacy

The Commission helps the region speak with a common voice. The Commission provides coordination, support and advocacy on issues where there is consensus among its Members. The Commission assists and supports its Members in advocating common positions. The Commission conducts advocacy programs and activities in coordination with other leading regional, national and international institutions. In formulating advocacy positions, the Commission welcomes opposing views.

Four Core Goals

