

## Tom Huntley remarks – Great Lakes Day in Washington 2006

Good morning, and welcome to **Great Lakes Day in Washington!** My name is Tom Huntley and I have the privilege of serving as chair of the Great Lakes Commission. It is a pleasure to see so many of our friends and colleagues gathered together for this annual event, a Great Lakes tradition established some 35 years ago, and we thank you for joining us today. I'd also like to give special thanks to the Northeast-Midwest Institute, our co-sponsor for today's events, and a valued partner in our efforts to restore, protect and sustainably manage the world's greatest freshwater resource.

Each year at Great Lakes Day, we gather together to address the needs of the Great Lakes and the measures that are called for to address them. This year, we are particularly pleased that the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has scheduled a hearing this day on the recommendations of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration to restore and protect the Great Lakes. That hearing will begin at 10 a.m. in Room SD-625 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building next door, and will feature testimony from Ohio Gov. Bob Taft, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, several of our Great Lakes senators and a number of other Great Lakes stakeholders and experts.

Our focus today, as always, is on the Great Lakes, but more specifically, it is on the outcomes of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration. This initiative, as I'm sure you all know, was a massive undertaking initiated by an executive order from President Bush and supported by our Great Lakes governors, mayors and tribal authorities, with the goal of producing a broad-based strategy to restore and protect the Great Lakes. More than 1,500 Great Lakes stakeholders and experts worked diligently together for a year to identify and prioritize the most critical Great Lakes needs and make recommendations for addressing them.

The result is the **Great Lakes Regional Collaboration's Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes**. A regional consensus of this scope is a rare achievement, and one of considerable value. The Great Lakes are a unique national and international treasure constituting the largest surface freshwater system in the world. Yet they are beset by massive problems that have persisted for years without being adequately addressed.

We now have a narrow window of opportunity to capitalize on the efforts of the **Great Lakes Regional Collaboration** and maintain the momentum generated by that process. The time for action is now.

Our Great Lakes governors, mayors and tribes have identified a set of near-term legislative priorities from among the recommendations of the Great Lakes Strategy. The Commission has endorsed these near-term actions as part of a unified regional agenda and made them the basis of its own legislative requests to Congress that it submits each year on behalf of its member states. These are outlined in the "Supporting Great Lakes Restoration" document distributed this morning.

Enactment of these near-term goals is a **necessary first step** toward implementing the overall Strategy and maintaining the momentum generated by the Regional Collaboration process. In brief, we are asking for Congress to support the following initiatives:

- Authorize the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to complete and operate two permanent dispersal barriers in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal to prevent the Asian carp and other invasive species from entering the Great Lakes
- Reauthorize the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act
- Reauthorize the Safe Drinking Water Act State Revolving Fund and the Clean Water Act State Revolving Loan Fund
- Fully fund the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health program to help secure safe and healthy beaches
- Appropriate the full amount authorized by the Great Lakes Legacy Act for restoring Great Lakes Areas of Concern, and provide support to state and local communities to develop and implement Remedial Action Plans for cleaning up those sites
- On toxic pollutants, fund pollution prevention, compliance assistance and waste minimization programs.
- Also, fund tribal fish contaminant monitoring programs and related screening and community education practices.
- Provide funding to begin restoration of 200,000 acres of wetlands in the Great Lakes basin.
- Authorize a new Great Lakes Tributary River Restoration Act to provide cost-shared grants for locally managed restoration projects in priority watersheds.
- Reauthorize the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act to address nonpoint source pollution, including funds for buffer strip programs and hydrologic improvements in urban watersheds.
- Fund the implementation of key ecosystem indicators for assessing progress toward restoration and protection goals.
- And finally, support sustainable use and development practices by funding the brownfields revitalization program for Great Lakes states and tribes to remediate brownfield waterfronts.

The Great Lakes Commission has long advocated the development of a broad-based, regional consensus on a comprehensive strategy to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

Thanks to the Regional Collaboration process, we now have such a strategy in hand. But again, we are facing a narrow window of opportunity to capitalize on this achievement. Through the Regional Collaboration, the entire Great Lakes community is now focused on a shared set of goals. If we do not act now to enact these near-term goals, we risk losing that momentum and the unity we have established.

Opportunities such as this do not come often – perhaps once in a generation. Let’s make the most of this one, for ourselves, for our region, for the generations to come and for the Great Lakes.