

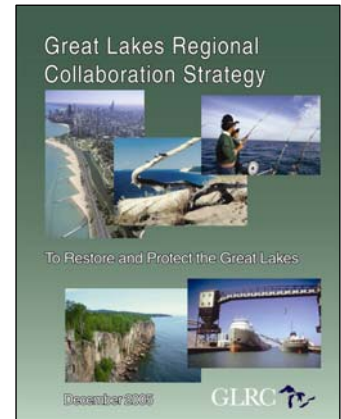


Investing in Great Lakes Restoration and Economic Revitalization

The Great Lakes are a unique and extraordinary natural resource for the region and the nation. They provide important benefits to the more than 32 million Americans who live in the region, including transportation for raw materials and finished goods; fresh water for our industries; drinking water for our communities; recreation for our citizens; and a vibrant ecosystem for diverse communities of plants and animals. The Great Lakes are both a valuable natural resource and a vital component of our region's economic infrastructure.

In these tough economic times it is imperative that we maximize the value of the Great Lakes. Doing so will create jobs, stimulate economic development and invest in freshwater resources that will be central to the future of the eight-state Great Lakes region. Restoring, protecting and strategically leveraging the Great Lakes is a wise investment that promises significant benefits:

- **\$50 billion in long-term benefits**, according to a comprehensive economic analysis prepared by The Brookings Institution.
- **Advancing a Business Agenda for Economic Transformation in the Great Lakes Region**, according to 25 metropolitan Chambers of Commerce that have recommended critical federal policy priorities for restoring the economic competitiveness of the Great Lakes region.



A Strategy for Restoring the Great Lakes

A variety of factors continue to impair the health of the Great Lakes and undermine the economic benefits they provide to the region. Fortunately, we have a plan in place to address these challenges. In 2004 a Presidential Executive Order recognized the Great Lakes as a "national treasure" and established the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) to develop a restoration strategy for the lakes. A coalition of more than 1,500 federal, state and local officials and interested stakeholders developed a comprehensive restoration blueprint listing key goals for restoring and protecting the Great Lakes. The strategy calls for federal action to:

- **Immediately stop the introduction of aquatic invasive species**
- **Increase habitat conservation and species management, including restoration of 550,000 acres of wetlands**
- **Protect nearshore waters and coastal areas by cleaning up pollution from sewers**
- **Clean up highly contaminated "Areas of Concern"**
- **Improve water quality by reducing polluted runoff**
- **Eliminate the discharge of, and reduce exposure to, persistent toxic substances**
- **Increase monitoring and coordination**
- **Ensure long-term, sustainable growth and economic development**

The *Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes*, released in December 2005, provides detailed recommendations for achieving these critical goals. The complete strategy is available online at www.glrc.us/strategy.html.

A Request to Congress: Provide Sustainable Funding for Great Lakes Restoration

Despite having a well-defined plan and a clear commitment from the region, federal funding to implement the Great Lakes restoration strategy has been woefully inadequate. During his campaign President Obama pledged to create a \$5 billion fund to jump start the Great Lakes restoration plan. Congress and the Administration should work together to provide a sustainable funding mechanism to restore the Great Lakes and maximize their economic and environmental benefits. Such a mechanism must include effective partnerships with the states, sound science and clear accountability. Overall coordination should be guided by a high-level Great Lakes “czar” who consolidates and rationalizes programs and budgets from multiple federal agencies.

Progress to Date

Since its release, many important steps have been taken to implement the GLRC Strategy: collaboration partners adopted an Implementation Framework in 2006; the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act and the Great Lakes Legacy Act were reauthorized; and all levels of government have begun to implement portions of the Strategy, while recognizing that more needs to be done. Five regional initiatives are under way in the areas of wetlands restoration, toxics reduction, aquatic invasive species prevention, beach contaminant remediation, and botulism Type E response. Most significantly, the Great Lakes states have implemented – and Congress has ratified – a historic regional Compact to ensure that the quantity and quality of Great Lakes water are managed for the well-being of future generations.

In addition, local governments are doing their part to restore and protect the Great Lakes. A recent study conducted by the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative and the Great Lakes Commission showed that **local governments alone are spending an estimated \$15 billion each year on Great Lakes restoration activities.**

Congress has introduced but never acted on legislation to implement the GLRC Strategy: the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Implementation Act. This legislation has bipartisan support and has been previously introduced in the 109th and 110th Congresses, most recently in 2009 as H.R. 500 by Rep. Vernon Ehlers (R-MI) and S. 237 by Senators Carl Levin (D-MI) and George Voinovich (R-OH). The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Implementation Act would address many of the federal policy and appropriations recommendations of the GLRC Strategy. Related legislation that would have authorized large-scale funding for Great Lakes restoration was also introduced in 2005 by then-Congressman Rahm Emanuel (D-IL): H.R. 792, the Great Lakes Restoration Act of 2005.

The recently passed economic stimulus package includes funding for several national programs that may support some of the GLRC priorities, including an estimated \$1.45 billion to help Great Lakes states and municipalities reduce pollution from aging wastewater systems. This is a good “down-payment;” however, effectively implementing the Great Lakes restoration strategy requires a long-term program to provide federal funding that will match contributions from state and local governments and private organizations. This critical, unmet need can be addressed by establishing a Great Lakes restoration trust fund, as proposed by President Obama, or through legislation similar to S. 237 and H.R. 500 of 2009, or H.R. 792 of 2005.

Economic and Environmental Benefits

In 2007 The Brookings Institution documented the value of economic benefits to be gained if the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy were implemented. The report, *Healthy Waters, Strong Economy: The Benefits of Restoring the Great Lakes Ecosystem*, estimated over **\$50 billion in long-term benefits**. Direct economic benefits from tourism, fishing and recreation alone are estimated at \$6.5 billion to \$11.8 billion. Additional high-value restoration opportunities include remediating Areas of Concern to raise coastal property values (\$12-19 billion); and implementing sediment management actions to reduce water treatment costs to municipalities (\$50-125 million). These estimates represent only a portion of the total long-term economic benefits projected by the Brookings study.

More Information

Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy: www.gllrc.us/strategy.html

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative: www.gllslcities.org

The Brookings Institution Great Lakes Economic Initiative: www.brookings.edu/projects/great-lakes.aspx