

## **Advancing Restoration of the Great Lakes: A Perspective from the United States Senate**

The Great Lakes are the backbone of our culture and our economy. The earliest European settlers saw something special in this region when they first arrived in the 1600s. By the 1700s, the fledgling United States, the European Powers, and Native American tribes saw so much value in the Great Lakes that they fought a series of wars spanning 60 years to decide who would control this area. They realized, even then, that the Great Lakes were a resource worth fighting for.

In their 10,000 year history, the Great Lakes have never been in so much peril as they are right now. Today, we need to decide, once again, if our Great Waters are a resource worth fighting for. Our enemies are invasive species, low water levels, global climate change, toxic sediments, and declining fish populations. In short, the enemy is us.

We need to act now to save our waters for our children and their children. This is a fight for our very identity and our way of life.

We need to make some decisions right now about the future of our region. Do we want a future where we can take our children to the beach, go tubing, or just swim in the lakes? Do we want a future where our children have good jobs in the new knowledge economy, supported by a strong industrial and agricultural

economy? Do we want a future where the Great Lakes region is a beacon of tourism and recreation?

This is a critical time for us. All the cards are laid out on the table. We know the problems we're facing. We know the solutions to those problems. We know the pricetag – upwards of \$26 billion. We know the stakes – the Great Lakes are critical to our economy and to our very identity as a region. And we know that the time to act is now.

Since I came to the Senate in 2001, I've been fighting for the Great Lakes. One of my first acts as Michigan's U.S. Senator was to pass a bill that bans oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes. This legislation was signed into law in 2001, and the ban was made permanent in 2005.

In 2006, President Bush signed my Michigan Lighthouse and Maritime Heritage Act into law, which creates a federal, state, and local partnership to restore Michigan lighthouses and promote the maritime culture of the Great Lakes. Michigan is home to more lighthouses than any other state – more than 120 – and they are important cultural landmarks and tourist destinations. Now, I'm working with the National Parks Service to implement this bill.

We passed the Water Resources Development Act, which authorizes ecological restoration in Lake St. Clair. It's called the "Heart of the Great Lakes" for a reason – not only is it a hub of

commerce and industrial activity, but it's also home to some of the most precious wetlands in the region. And I am continuing to press the Army Corps of Engineers about the cause of lower water levels in the St. Clair River. Protecting Lake St. Clair is a vital part of our strategy to protect the Great Lakes as a whole.

We passed an omnibus appropriations bill that includes \$9 million to create a barrier to keep Asian carp out of Lake Michigan, and includes \$97 million for Great Lakes-specific programs.

However, I know that, despite our progress, the U.S. government still hasn't stepped up to the plate. Unfortunately, over the last several years, state and local governments have been assuming more and more of the burden of cleaning up the Great Lakes at a cost of up to \$15 billion per year.

It is long past time for the federal government to make a serious investment in the future of the Great Lakes.

We're starting to take those steps. Just last week, the Senate passed a budget that includes \$77 million more than the President requested to make investments in the Great Lakes. Our budget lays the groundwork as we begin the process of hashing out the annual appropriations bills, and calls for investments in fisheries, toxic sediment removal, water quality programs, and programs to fight invasive species.

I am continuing to make water quality issues and the real-time monitoring of the Clinton River and Lake St. Clair a priority.

We're also working on a farm bill that I hope will include \$4 billion investment in conservation programs. We amended the Great Lakes Basin Program in the farm bill to include the Great Lakes Regional Collaborative Strategy – the first time the Strategy has been referenced in the law.

The Great Lakes Basin Program's money goes to the Great Lakes Commission to distribute for erosion control activities, keeping sediment out of the water and making our lakes cleaner. It helps landowners prevent sediment and erosion into waterways and is a first line of defense for the Great Lakes in many ways.

Unfortunately, this program has been shamefully underfunded. Nevertheless, since this program was started, 389 programs have been funded that have prevented over one million tons of soil and over 5 million pounds of phosphorus from reaching the Great Lakes or their tributaries. We know this program works – now we need to step up and make sure it has the money it needs to get the job done. Last year, \$5 million in grants and \$7 million in matching funds were left on the table because this program didn't have the funding it needed. I'm committed to getting as much funding as I can to make this program work to its full potential.

I am also working to pass strong ballast water legislation to keep invasive species out of the Great Lakes. Our bill would require

ships to use the best science available to treat their ballast water before discharging it. The House of Representatives may include this as part of their Coast Guard legislation, and we need to stay united and keep up the pressure to pass this common-sense legislation by the end of the year.

I'm also very involved in efforts to combat Phragmites in our wetlands. This reed is destroying wetland habitats, jeopardizing fish and bird populations, and ruining lake access for our citizens. In the short-term, we need to stop the spread of Phragmites and get rid of it where we can. But in the long-term, I'm focused on handling this in much the same way that we got rid of the purple loosestrife which was a problem in the 80s and 90s – by using the latest scientific research to control this plant once and for all.

In Michigan especially, we are facing serious economic challenges. This is a tough time for us, but the Great Lakes give us hope and optimism for the future. Restoring the Great Lakes presents us with real economic opportunities. We need to start thinking of the Regional Collaborative Strategy as a blueprint for our economic turnaround.

As we transition to a global knowledge economy, we need to attract and keep bright minds and innovative businesses. All of us in this room have experienced the beauty and majesty of the Great Lakes, whether it's out on a boat, enjoying an afternoon at the beach, or watching one of our incredible sunsets. We need to be able to brag about the Great Lakes as a "fringe benefit" that

other regions of the country just can't compete with. Who wants to live in a desert when you can be surrounded by the natural beauty of the Great Lakes?!

These investments pay for themselves. According to the Brookings Institution, implementing the Collaborative Strategy will create a net gain of at least \$24 billion in long-term economic benefits for our region.

Cleaning up toxic sediments can yield dividends up to \$11 billion from fishing, tourism, and recreation.

Implementing the Strategy will reduce cleanup costs for state and local governments by up to \$125 million.

Sediment management can reduce drinking water treatment costs by as much as \$12 million per year.

Cleaner water and safer beaches mean property values in coastal areas can soar by up to almost \$20 billion.

Fish populations are predicted to continue their decline by between 25 and 50 percent. Fixing this problem could yield dividends of up to \$5 billion.

By implementing the Strategy, we can reduce beach closures – a real problem for Lake St. Clair especially – and see dividends of \$2 to \$3 billion.

We have our work cut out for us. This fight isn't going to be easy. But this is a fight not only for our future, but for our very identity. And the longer we wait, the more it's going to cost us.

This battle for our beautiful waters is about our future and economic well-being. By being here today, you've already decided that the Great Lakes are a resource worth fighting for. You are on the front lines every single day, and I commend you for your dedication. I'm honored to be your partner in this endeavor, and I'm committed to doing everything I can in Washington to get the resources we need to get the job done.

For me, fighting for the Great Lakes doesn't just make economic sense, it's a moral imperative. I'm reminded of an ancient Native American proverb:

"Treat the earth well. We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we borrow it from our Children."

Thank you.