



Adopted March 6, 2013

Cooperative and Flexible Nonpoint Source Conservation Programs to Sustain a Healthy Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem

Whereas, agriculture in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin is crucial to the region's economy, with the basin itself accounting for nearly 25 percent of the total Canadian agricultural production and 7 percent of the U.S. production while generating more than \$15 billion per year in products in the United States alone; and

Whereas, the Great Lakes basin's unique climate allows it to support a variety of agricultural specialty crops such as vegetables, orchards and vineyards along with the region's mainstays of corn, soybeans, hay, dairy and poultry production; and

Whereas, agricultural production supports numerous industries including truck, rail and waterborne commerce, that provide significant income and thousands of jobs for the region; and

Whereas, agriculture has helped shape the socio-economic heritage and culture of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River and has contributed to the strong land stewardship and conservation ethics of the region's citizens; and

Whereas, the Great Lakes basin suffers from sediment and nutrient loadings from agricultural and other lands impacted by human activities, resulting in impairment of water quality, loss of recreational opportunities, loss of fish and wildlife habitat, increased treatment costs for public water supplies, and the increased frequency and continuing high costs of drainage network, harbor and stream channel maintenance; and

Whereas, in 2010 and 2011, water quality problems caused by excessive nutrient inputs (e.g., phosphorus) reached crisis proportion in some areas of the Great Lakes, especially in western Lake Erie where harmful algal blooms fouled nearshore areas and beaches; and

Whereas, the reemergence of harmful algal blooms and oxygen depleted areas (dead zones) due to increased levels of soluble reactive (dissolved) phosphorus has created a sense of urgency among scientists and managers to better understand the causes of the problem and to act quickly and appropriately; and

Whereas, recognizing the importance of agriculture to the region and the history of agricultural land owners and government working together to steward the land for future generations, federal, state and provincial management agencies have recognized the need to develop programs that are fair, flexible and consistent but also targeted geographically to meet the challenges posed by severe water quality problems emerging in certain watersheds; and

Whereas, states, provinces and numerous organizations including the Great Lakes Commission have invested time and effort in bringing together scientific, policy and management experts to consider new and creative ways to address the problem associated with urban, suburban and rural inputs of phosphorus to the Great Lakes; and

Whereas, the Great Lakes Commission's Phosphorus Reduction Task Force, in its 2012 report, encouraged state, provincial and federal agencies to take action to solve the problems associated with phosphorus runoff from agriculture lands, including the need for increased monitoring and the adoption of regulatory approaches such as Ohio's "Stressed Watershed" program; and

Whereas, important U.S. federal programs such as the Section 319 Program of the Clean Water Act and the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill have contributed greatly to the substantial progress made in stemming soil erosion, reducing sedimentation and improving water quality in the Great Lakes basin and nationally; and

Whereas, these two programs were viewed by the Phosphorus Reduction Task Force as primary vehicles for providing states, landowners and resource managers with funding, guidance and assistance for solving the nutrient loading problems associated with agriculture; and

Whereas, while the Section 319 Program has been an important tool for state and local agencies to focus and coordinate their nonpoint source programs with support from the U.S. EPA, funding for the program has been consistently shrinking, down 31 percent nationally from 2003 levels; and

Whereas, while the next Farm Bill, due to be reauthorized in 2013, is expected to include strong conservation programs and incentives to achieve environmental protection goals, there may also be reductions in funding authorization levels for some Conservation Title Programs from the 2008 bill.

Therefore, Be it Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission recognizes the importance of agriculture to our region, its contributions to the economy, culture and quality of life of the region's citizens and the strong conservation and land stewardship ethics shown by most agricultural land owners; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission is committed to working with its member states and provinces and agriculture interests to develop consistent and cooperative solutions to the problems associated with agricultural runoff and excessive nutrient loadings; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission calls for a reauthorized Farm Bill, with a strong conservation title that addresses the unique soil and water conservation needs of the Great Lakes basin including flexible programs to reduce nutrients on a priority watershed basis while at the same time maintaining support for important programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), among others; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission supports the development of a regional conservation partnership program under the Farm Bill to further enhance opportunities to leverage additional financial and technical assistance needed to improve water quality and address agricultural runoff; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission encourages its member states to build upon and expand the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreements with the USDA, under which states contribute funding, in addition to the federal CREP funding, to pay farmers to address targeted conservation issues within the state; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission encourages the NRCS, under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to continue support for the Strategic Watershed Action Teams (SWATs) in the Great Lakes basin to provide additional technical assistance in priority watersheds: and

Be it Finally Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission supports enhanced funding to the Great Lakes states under the Clean Water Act Section 319 Program to support the states' efforts in areas related to technical assistance, financial assistance, education, technology transfer, demonstration projects and monitoring to assess the success of specific nonpoint source implementation projects.