

Adopted Oct. 8, 2010

Resolution: Measures to improve Great Lakes Water Quality Including Reauthorization of the Federal Food Conservation and Energy Act (Farm Bill) of 2008

Whereas, the United States has made tremendous progress in stemming soil erosion, improving water and air quality and restoring and protecting valuable wetlands and fish and wildlife habitat since the inclusion of the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill of 1985; and

Whereas, the Farm bills have become one of the most important vehicles for the U.S. Department of Agriculture - Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to help improve and protect soil and water resources by providing financial and technical assistance to landowners to implement farm and ranchland conservation plans; and

Whereas, the 2008 Farm Bill provides expanded conservation opportunities to address high priority environmental goals that build on the conservation gains made by farmers and ranchers through the 1985, 1996 and 2002 Farm Bills; and

Whereas, specific Farm Bill programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control (GLBP), among others, have been especially valuable and effective tools for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River region for improving habitat, managing sediment and advancing soil and water conservation efforts; and

Whereas, the U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Committee has begun discussions and held hearings on the 2012 Farm Bill; and

Whereas, opportunities should be explored to expand or enhance the Conservation Title of the current Farm Bill in order to achieve environmental protection goals that build upon progress made over the past 25 years; and

Whereas, the Great Lakes as the world's greatest freshwater resource have specific ecosystem protection needs that must be addressed under the next Farm Bill; and

Whereas, the Great Lakes still suffer from excessive amounts of sediment and nutrient loadings from metropolitan areas, suburban and rural communities causing impairments to water quality, harmful algal blooms, impacts to water-based recreation, loss of fish and wildlife habitat, the need for increased treatment of and threats to domestic water supplies, and continuing high costs of stream channel and harbor maintenance; and

Whereas, nonpoint source pollution control is cited as one of the most pressing priorities for the Great Lakes region especially to achieve habitat protection and restoration goals; and

Whereas, Farm Bill programs are among the U.S. federal government's most powerful tools to meet this need.

Therefore, Be it Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission applauds the progress that has been made to conserve and protect the soil, air and land resources of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River region under the current and past Farm bills; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission urges a stronger USDA–NRCS commitment to programs which further the goals of restoration and protection outlined under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) through voluntary, incentive-based approaches on privately owned lands; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission encourages the USDA-NRCS to develop and implement programs for the Great Lakes that address soil and water conservation needs on a priority watershed basis, consistent with the GLRI; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission supports the creation of Strategic Watershed Action Teams (SWATs) recommended by the Secretary of Agriculture to deliver programs at the watershed scale under the GLRI; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture direct NRCS to establish ecosystem-based outcomes in the delivery, reporting and evaluation of its conservation treatment programs under the Farm Bill; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission urges NRCS to expand its technical assistance cost-share arrangements for implementing Farm Bill programs by providing block grants to states for executing technical assistance agreements with Soil and Water Conservation Districts or other providers; and

Be it Finally Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission supports Farm Bill conservation provisions that emphasize Great Lakes basin ecosystem health; enhance the quality of life in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River region; improve or restore air, soil and water quality in local watersheds; and contribute to the production of safe and affordable food and fiber products for residents of the region.