

Great Lakes Protection

Ministry of the Environment



Purpose



- The Great Lakes are vitally important to Ontario’s families and communities for our drinking water, our quality of life, and our prosperity. We need to keep them healthy now and for our future.
- As part of its Throne Speech, on November 22, 2011, the Province committed to “*work with environmental experts and community groups to develop and introduce a Great Lakes Protection Act.*”
- The government introduced the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act into the legislature on June 6, 2012 and at the same time released a draft Ontario’s Great Lakes Strategy for comment.
- The proposed Great Lakes Protection Act is about creating opportunities for communities to make improvements in their corner of the Great Lakes, improving water quality and protecting beaches, wetlands and coasts.
- We want all Ontarians to be Great Lakes Guardians and help make sure our lakes are drinkable, swimmable, fishable.

All Ontarians have a stake in the ecological health of the Great Lakes.



Protecting the Great Lakes



*The health of the Great Lakes has improved in some areas, while other areas have seen a decline.
The causes are varied and require multi-government and multi-stakeholder solutions.*

Beach Closures and Algae

- Shorelines and waterfronts are being degraded
- Beach closure postings
- Filamentous (nuisance) algae (green slime) covering waterfronts
- Massive blooms of potentially toxic blue-green algae (Lake Erie)

Invasive Species

- Changes in the food-web, decline in fisheries
- Clogged water intakes
- More pathogens
- Risk of new invaders: Asian carp

Population Growth

- Increased stormwater and wastewater, treatment not keeping pace
- Loss of natural cover
- More water use



Natural Heritage

- Loss of critical habitat
- Declining coastal health
- More species at risk
- Loss of natural and cultural heritage

Harmful Pollutants

- Chemicals of emerging concern (e.g. some flame retardants, pharmaceuticals)
- Fish consumption restrictions
- Reproductive/ immune impairment in some wildlife
- Potential human health impacts

Climate Change

Could impact:

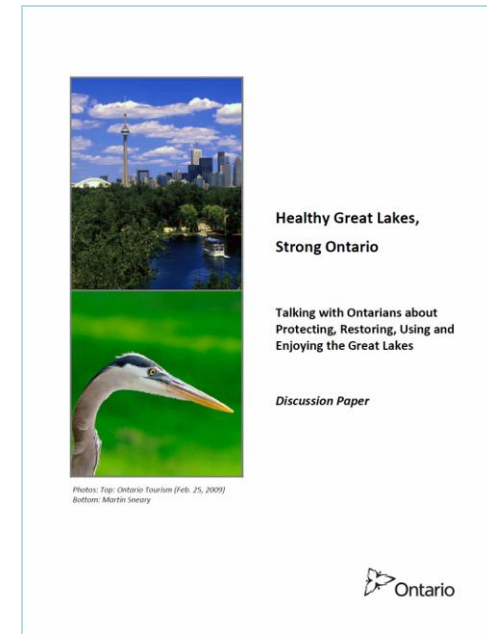
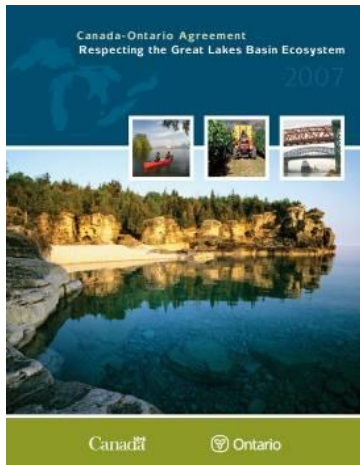
- Lake levels
- Water availability
- Intensity of storms
- Stressed infrastructure
- Increased flooding



Context



- Canada and the U.S. have updated the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) to provide a framework for bi-national action.
- Ontario is working with the Canadian federal government to negotiate a new Canada-Ontario Agreement (COA). The existing COA expired June 24, 2012. Work will continue until a new agreement is in place, anticipated in 2013.



- Since the Throne Speech announcement to introduce Great Lakes protection legislation, the Minister held listening sessions with Great Lakes municipalities, environmental organizations, industry, agricultural and tourism sectors, and met with First Nation and Métis communities and others.
- The Ministry of the Environment is committed to listening to its partners' suggestions and to working together to protect the Great Lakes.

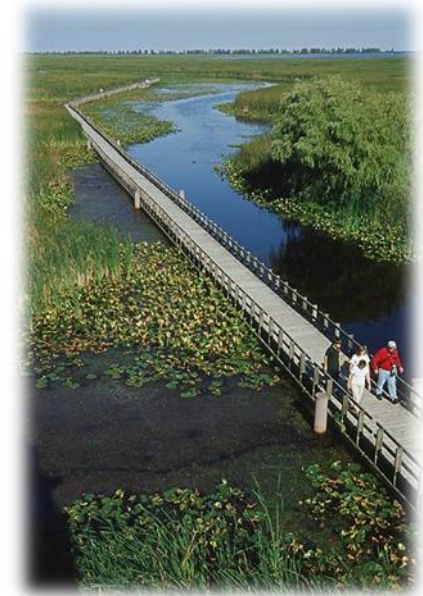


Principles Guiding Act Development



Based on what we have heard, the following principles have been used to guide the development of the proposed act and Draft Strategy:

- **Set direction and address priority areas:** provide strategic direction and focus on priority issues and stressed areas to reflect the large geographic area and complex issues within basin
 - identify impacted or vulnerable areas for action
 - protect natural heritage
 - address water quality stressed areas
 - manage water quantity
 - address nearshore issues and protect coastal values
- **Use a phased approach:** to be able to develop policies and plans over time, on a priority basis, given limited resources
- **Be efficient by building on existing tools and governance**
- **Empower communities:** enable communities to be empowered to take meaningful actions and to build partnerships
- **Address cumulative impacts:** by setting direction on an ecosystem basis



Following dialogues with Great Lakes partners, including First Nations communities, proposed legislation could provide authority to affect legal instruments (e.g. environmental approvals, land use planning approvals) to support achieving desired outcomes.

Elements of Proposed Act



- Although there is an environmental protection framework in place, there is a need to fill key gaps and to strategically coordinate existing legislative tools and other actions to protect the Great Lakes.
- The Great Lakes Protection Act, if passed, would provide additional protective measures to address Great Lakes priority issues.
- The purposes of the proposed act are to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin; and to create opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in the protection and restoration of the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin.
- If passed, the proposed act would:
 - establish a **Great Lakes Guardians' Council** to improve collaboration, identify priorities and partnerships
 - provide authority to set **Great Lakes Targets** to help guide future actions
 - following consultation, provide authority to take phased, targeted action on priority areas through **geographically-focused initiatives** and provincial regulation to protect shorelines, wetlands and coastal areas in specific areas
 - establish **Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy**, which provides a roadmap for future action.
- The proposed act also recognizes First Nations and Métis communities with a historic relationship with the Great Lakes may contribute traditional ecological knowledge to support protection.



Guardians' Council



The proposed act establishes a **Great Lakes Guardians' Council**, as a forum to:

- identify priorities for actions to achieve the purposes of the proposed act
 - identify projects, potential funding measures and potential partnerships
 - facilitate information sharing; and
 - give the Minister of the Environment an opportunity to obtain input on:
 - targets
 - development or implementation of initiatives, and
 - inter-jurisdictional agreements.
- The Minister of the Environment would extend invitations to participate on the Great Lakes Guardians' Council to Great Lakes Ministers, including:
 - Natural Resources; Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Infrastructure; Aboriginal Affairs; Economic Development and Innovation; Tourism, Culture and Sport; Transportation; and Intergovernmental Affairs.
 - Other partners invited to participate on the Council would include municipalities, First Nations and Métis communities, environmental organizations, scientists, industry, agriculture, recreation and tourism sectors and other interests.

Geographically-Focused Initiatives



- The proposed act is enabling legislation. It would, if passed, provide authority to develop geographically-focused initiatives, targeting:
 - **stressed areas** (e.g. Thames River or Grand River and other watersheds in Lake Erie; southeast shores of Lake Huron; western basin of Lake Ontario), and
 - **priority issues**, such as excessive algae, protection of important Great Lakes habitat, or coordination of efforts to improve beaches.
- Initiatives could build on existing work, combining and aligning resources and coordinating efforts from different partners in Great Lakes protection.
- These initiatives could be developed by the province or another public body (such as a municipality or conservation authority), through a collaborative process.
- The initiatives would include:
 - **legally enforceable policies:** that can affect government permits and approvals. For example, if the initiative was focused on protecting a coastal area, a policy could require that construction along the shoreline does not go too close to the water's edge but leaves some green space (similar to the approach in the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan); and/or
 - **recommendations for a shoreline regulation:** policies which recommend the development of a shoreline regulation, such as protection of vegetated areas along shorelines, site alteration, and invasive species disposal, to protect sensitive shoreline area.
- The initiatives could also include **general policies and commitments**, such as programs to promote good stewardship, education and outreach, best management practices, and research.

Ontario's Draft Great Lakes Strategy



- Along with proposed legislation, the Province has released a draft Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy, developed through collaboration across Great Lakes ministries.
- The draft Strategy includes a summary of Great Lakes environmental conditions, a summary of Ontario's actions taken to date, and identification of priority areas for future action on Great Lakes.
- The proposed act would require the Strategy be reported on regularly and reviewed at least every nine years.
- The draft Strategy highlights Great Lakes goals, which include:
 - **empowering communities** through support for local community action, as well as partnership approaches with First Nations and Métis communities and others
 - **protecting water** including work on municipal water, wastewater and stormwater, on rural non-point pollution, on managing water quantity, and ongoing work on harmful pollution reduction
 - **improving wetlands, beaches and coastal areas**, including advancing nearshore protection and Area of Concern clean-ups
 - **protecting habitats and species** including preventing, detecting, and managing invasive species
 - **enhancing understanding and adaptation**, with a focus on Great Lakes science including research, monitoring, knowledge sharing, and action on climate change adaptation
 - **ensuring environmentally sustainable economic opportunities and innovation.**
- The draft Strategy also includes a Great Lakes community action program, which could support local actions to achieve the goals of the proposed act and Strategy.



Our Shared Opportunity



- You can find our proposed Great Lakes Protection Act and draft Strategy at:
www.ontario.ca/healthygreatlakes
- Protecting the Great Lakes is a shared opportunity for all the Great Lakes partners, on both sides of our border.
- We have already done so much together to help improve the health of the Great Lakes, and there is tremendous potential for long-term return on all of our investments and real benefits for all people living around the Great Lakes.

