



# *Strategic Plan for the Great Lakes Commission*

A statement of vision, mission, goals, objectives and strategic actions to guide the work of the Great Lakes Commission through the year 2012  
Approved by the Commission May 15, 2007.

## *Vision for the Region – 2012*

We, the state and provincial Members of the Great Lakes Commission, envision a healthy, vibrant Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River region that exemplifies our shared ideals of environmental quality, economic growth and stewardship for current and future generations.

Our ideals for the region include:

- ◆ Our pride of place and sense of regional identity inspire our commitment to protect, maintain, restore and sustainably use our bounty of freshwater resources. Our children choose to live and work here because of the opportunities offered and high quality of life.
- ◆ The waters of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin (Basin) are accessible to the public and provide high quality drinking water for millions of people; safe, unpolluted beaches for swimming and boating; and a thriving fishery, free of consumption advisories.
- ◆ The waters of the Basin support a diverse and healthy web of plants, fish and wildlife. Governments and the public share a sense of stewardship and optimism that our waters, lands and related resources are being wisely used, managed, protected and enhanced.
- ◆ Harbors and waterways support recreational boating and a commercial navigation industry that efficiently moves goods, enhances the competitiveness of our regional economy, and sets a global example in minimizing environmental impacts.
- ◆ Healthy and diverse populations of native flora and fauna are protected by preventing the introduction and spread of invasive species.
- ◆ Government leaders recognize the importance of critical issues facing the Great Lakes, speak with a unified voice, and make decisions that enhance resource protection and economic development.
- ◆ The Great Lakes region is viewed domestically and internationally as a model for sustainable development because of our commitment to stewardship of our resources.

## *Our Vision for the Great Lakes Commission - 2012*

The Great Lakes Commission is a leader among regional institutions, serving its Members – the states and provinces – by helping them collectively fulfill their vision for the region.

The Commission is a respected and trusted voice because its products and positions are built on collaboration with others, encourage economic prosperity and environmental protection, and are science-based. The Commission is an important binational forum that fosters dialogue among decisionmakers in its Member states and provinces to enable them to reach consensus on the region's priorities and speak with a unified voice.

Commission programs provide leadership in the areas of communication and education, information integration and reporting, facilitation and consensus building, and policy coordination and advocacy.

## *Mission*

The Great Lakes Commission is a public agency established by the Great Lakes Basin Compact in 1955 to help its Member states and provinces speak with a unified voice and collectively fulfill their vision for a healthy, vibrant Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River region. Commission products and services focus on communication and education, information integration and reporting, facilitation and consensus building, and policy coordination and advocacy.

The purpose of the Commission is to carry out the terms and requirements of the Great Lakes Basin Compact, as noted in Article 1: To promote the orderly, integrated, and comprehensive development, use, and conservation of the water resources of the Great Lakes Basin.

## *Goals, Objectives and Actions*

### **Goal 1: Communication and Education**

The Commission raises public awareness of ecosystem management and the links between environmental quality and economic viability. The Commission educates and empowers government, citizens and other stakeholders to effectively participate in decisions affecting the future of the region.

Objectives:

- Foster public stewardship and understanding of ecosystem management.
  - Develop a dynamic Great Lakes atlas as a repository for reference information on the Great Lakes Information Network (GLIN).
  - Create new content on GLIN to synthesize and interpret information; make complex topics understandable to a lay audience; and engage the public in solutions.
  - Provide pass-through funds from federal or other sources to states, provinces or local entities for monitoring, cleanup and education programs, such as through the Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control.
- Maximize the use of information technologies in communication and education programs throughout the region by providing leadership, infrastructure and support for Internet-accessible resources.
  - Apply Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and related technology and communication mechanisms to GLIN and associated websites to enhance their effectiveness in disseminating information. Customize and target these technologies to the needs of specific audiences.
  - Enhance the use of two-way communication mechanisms, such as web conferencing, community-driven encyclopedias (wikis) and discussion forums, on GLIN and associated websites.
  - Develop training and web-based tutorials to better enable the Great Lakes constituency to use information technologies.
- Inform and advise state/provincial decisionmakers about Great Lakes issues on a regional, binational and international scale.
  - Implement a Communications Strategy for the Great Lakes Commission to provide guidance on key messages and optimal delivery mechanisms for various audiences.
  - Expand the content, delivery and audience demographic of GLIN Daily News.
- Support efforts to promote Great Lakes tourism, marine transportation and other water-based activities. The Commission will complement the work of others in this area and, where appropriate, will lead efforts to coordinate regional activities or pool resources.
  - Enhance GLIN's capacity to be a clearinghouse for Great Lakes Circle Tour information.

- Convene state/provincial tourism bureaus to enhance Circle Tour offerings and coordination, and identify new opportunities.
- Support programs that encourage responsible practices by Great Lakes recreational users to prevent the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species.
- Promote the benefits of marine transportation, including pollution savings and economic advantages as a transportation artery of the continent, while acknowledging the impacts on the environment and other users.

## Goal 2: Information Integration and Reporting

The Commission researches, collects, organizes and makes accessible data and information about the Great Lakes that is relevant to our Members, individually and collectively, and to others in the Great Lakes region. Decisionmakers rely on data maintained by the Commission to support planning, resource management and other activities.

Objectives:

- Promote adoption of uniform data collection and information management standards and protocols for use by our Members and the region as a whole.
  - Facilitate regional collaborative programs such as the Great Lakes Air Deposition and Great Lakes Water Use Database projects that create objective input for decisionmaking by the states and provinces.
  - Promote the inclusion of metadata with all Great Lakes datasets.
  - Conduct outreach to promote awareness of data standards and information collection protocols.
- Facilitate interagency information integration programs across the region.
  - Support periodic forums, such as the Regional Data Exchange Conference, that coordinate observing and monitoring activities.
  - Work with Members and partners to address institutional barriers to efficient exchange of regional data and information, such as coordinating formal data exchange agreements and identifying state information integration priorities.
- Consolidate information to support research, management and policy development interests of Members and Observers.
  - Assess the needs of Members and Observers, on an annual basis, for aggregated data within priority issue areas.
  - Work collaboratively with state, provincial and regional agencies to develop and maintain high quality data and information tools for issues of interest to Members and the region as a whole.
  - Develop and maintain a Great Lakes regional GIS to consolidate and serve geographic data to Members and the public.
- Serve as a clearinghouse of information about the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region and Great Lakes programs.
  - Publish datasets and information products on GLIN.
  - Publish an online catalog of data, reports and other informational products relevant to the Commission's mission.
- Provide analysis and reporting on the conditions and trends of ecological and economic factors affecting the Great Lakes, where such information is not otherwise available and is needed to serve the interests of Members.
  - Provide data analysis and reporting support to panels and workgroups involving state and provincial agencies, Observers and others, to facilitate regional decisionmaking on critical issues.
  - Support collection and assessment of data to measure progress toward ecosystem restoration goals, such as the use of key Great Lakes environmental indicators to assess progress toward goals of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes.
  - Develop staff expertise to provide economic benefit-cost analyses to support policy and management decisions on aquatic invasive species and other issues.

## Goal 3: Facilitation and Consensus Building

The Commission convenes and leads multistakeholder forums, projects and activities on issues and ideas of importance to Member jurisdictions and others. The Commission provides forums where emerging issues and ideas are identified, leading research is presented, conflicting views are shared and debated, and consensus is built around potential solutions.

Objectives:

- Serve as neutral broker of information, ideas and analyses by convening forums to share information and facilitate regional approaches and solutions.
  - Convene and provide secretariat support for Commission task forces, working groups and committees, such as the Great Lakes Dredging Team, the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species and the Great Lakes Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Task Force.
  - Establish and convene new committees, task forces and work groups, as needed, to address emerging regional priorities and improve coordination of programs and policy implementation.
  - Convene conferences and symposia on emerging issues such as renewable energy, water conservation and coastal management to share information, innovative approaches and success stories among states and provinces.
- Enhance dialogue and debate among Members to build consensus on regional issues.
  - Develop and implement a strategy, built on regional consensus, to prevent the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species.
  - Design and conduct semiannual Commission meetings that feature expert panels on timely and high priority regional topics.
  - Convene periodic meetings of individual state and provincial delegations to enhance dialogue and identify emerging issues, challenges and opportunities for appropriate Commission action.
  - Develop and endorse resolutions and policy positions on issues where Members agree.
  - In conjunction with stakeholders, define and promote environmentally sustainable shipping practices.
- Monitor relevant regional, national/binational and international policy forums and initiatives of relevance to the Great Lakes, report to Members and, where appropriate, represent Members' views in such forums and initiatives.
  - Participate in review of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.
  - Monitor and react to activities under the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, U.S. Ocean Action Plan and related initiatives.
  - Track progress on implementation of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes.

## Goal 4: Policy Coordination and Advocacy

The Commission helps the region speak with a common voice. The Commission provides coordination, support and advocacy on issues where there is consensus among its Members. The Commission assists and supports its Members in advocating common positions.

The Commission conducts advocacy programs and activities in coordination with other leading regional, national and international institutions. In formulating advocacy positions, the Commission welcomes opposing views.

Objectives:

- Facilitate and, when appropriate, represent Members' views on regional and U.S. federal policy and legislative initiatives.
  - Facilitate communication among Members on federal and legislative priorities through discussions at Commission meetings, topic-specific workgroups, exchange of written materials and other mechanisms.
  - Represent the consensus views of Members in communications to Congress, the International Joint Commission, federal agencies and other forums.
  - When requested by Members, develop regional approaches for key issues that are not addressed by regional agreements or federal legislation.
- In collaboration with others, establish regional priorities on U.S. federal legislation and funding.
  - Coordinate and consult with the Council of Great Lakes Governors and other regional institutions and partners as federal legislative priorities are developed.
  - Publish an annual report on regional legislative priorities and educate members of Congress on these priorities through briefings and meetings.
  - Facilitate communication and coordinate advocacy activities with organizations in other regions on high priority Great Lakes issues.
  - Provide policy advocacy support to the panels and task forces convened and served by the Commission, where their views are consistent with Members' priorities.
  - Advocate for necessary resources to accomplish critical Great Lakes information collection and monitoring tasks that are designed to support priority activities and measure progress toward regional goals, such as those identified by the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration.
- Develop supporting materials and execute communication strategies to advocate Commission priorities and assist Members in advocating these priorities to U.S. federal policymakers.
  - Implement and maintain a Great Lakes Legislative Priorities Database to track appropriations and authorizations important to the Commission, the Council of Great Lakes Governors and others, and provide relevant information on bills, sponsors and committees.
  - Engage Members and key stakeholders in coordinated campaigns to support the Commission's top legislative priorities.
  - Identify and work with Members who can advocate on specific issues, based on special expertise or contacts with key federal policymakers.
  - Organize an annual event to bring Commissioners and other stakeholders to Washington for advocacy meetings with federal policymakers.
- Coordinate and lead programs that assist Members and others with promoting awareness and appreciation of Great Lakes values, issues and priorities among federal and international policymakers.
  - Conduct a biennial Congressional tour and coordinate other opportunities for members of Congress and their staff to be briefed on key Great Lakes issues.
  - Provide review, analysis and, where appropriate, advice to Members on state, provincial, national and international proposals, agreements, legislation and other policy initiatives affecting Members' interests in the Great Lakes.
  - Conduct issue briefings for regional policymakers, such as state legislators, which provide regional perspectives on alternative policy approaches and successful initiatives underway within individual jurisdictions.



## *Guiding Principles*

The following principles guide the actions of the Great Lakes Commission in its work. These principles set high standards that we, as an organization, aspire to and that help us to define what we are moving toward.

- ◆ Great Lakes Commission initiatives are defined by our Member jurisdictions and add value by bringing a regional perspective to state and provincial Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River programs, projects and priorities.
- ◆ Great Lakes Commissioners are ambassadors for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River region and serve as liaisons between their jurisdictions and the Commission. Commissioners bring their individual expertise to bear on regional issues, building collective solutions with their fellow Commissioners.
- ◆ The Board of Directors convenes, engages and coordinates its state/provincial delegation on Commission priorities, projects and operations in accordance with the Great Lakes Basin Compact and the Commission's Strategic Plan.
- ◆ The Commission is transparent about its various roles, which include convener, facilitator, advocate and information broker.
- ◆ The Commission provides information that integrates relevant scientific, economic and policy components to guide decisionmaking.
- ◆ The Commission values inclusiveness in its projects, partnerships and decisionmaking; diverse views are welcomed and considered.
- ◆ The Commission respects the roles of other regional institutions and partners with them to build on respective strengths to achieve common goals.
- ◆ The Commission supports sustainable development principles and reflects this commitment in all its operations.