



Adopted Sept. 9, 2013

Recognizing rivermouths: Places vital to the Great Lakes basin that deserve focused restoration and conservation

Whereas, rivermouths are a class or type of ecosystem marked by the mixing zones that occur at the confluence between Great Lakes tributaries (riverine ecosystems) and the Great Lakes; and

Whereas, rivermouths are biologically productive, transitional ecosystems that provide diverse habitats and exhibit dynamic ecological and geo-chemical processes; and

Whereas, human development around the Great Lakes has historically centered around these rivermouths, in part because they provide a rich array of services such as transportation, water supply, fish habitat, waste assimilation, water quality regulation, recreation, and storm protection; and

Whereas, centuries of intense human activity have led to substantial pressures on, and alterations to, these ecosystems, often diminishing or degrading their ecological functions and associated ecological services; and

Whereas, historically, activities to enhance a particular rivermouth ecosystem service often influenced and degraded other services; and

Whereas, the link between rivermouth ecological processes and the ecological services derived from them is difficult to quantify and remains an area of active research; and

Whereas, the health and condition of rivermouth zones are important indicators of the sustainability of activities and practices upstream and throughout the watershed; and

Whereas, some degraded Great Lakes rivermouths are the focus of intense restoration efforts: 36 of the active Great Lakes Areas of Concern (AOCs) are rivermouths or areas that include one or more rivermouths, such as harbors and connecting channels; and

Whereas, restoration of AOCs is an important step toward improving the condition of some Great Lakes rivermouths as well as the economic and social values of the communities that are dependent on these areas; and

Whereas, many other rivermouths that are not AOCs should be managed to maximize their ecological health, associated ecosystem services, and economic and social values; and

Whereas, once delisted, former AOC rivermouths and the communities associated with them will need ongoing careful management to ensure their continued environmental health and economic prosperity; and

Whereas, Annex 2 of the newly amended Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between the United States and Canada calls for the development of an integrated nearshore framework as part of the lakewide management process of each lake; and

Whereas, in contrast to marine estuaries, freshwater rivermouths have not been explicitly recognized as the focus of conservation and management programs; and

Whereas, rivermouths are of considerable importance to the maritime economy, and contribute to the vitality of communities throughout the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region.

Therefore, Be It Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission and its members formally recognize Great Lakes rivermouths as a unique class of ecosystem, the health of which is vital to both the health of the Great Lakes, their supporting tributaries and the communities that depend on them; and

Be It Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission endorses efforts to restore and maintain the ecological health and functionality of these special places that are the focus of ecological and human productivity; and

Be It Further Resolved, that successful long-term restoration and conservation of these unique and vital places should explicitly consider the variety of ecosystem services provided by these places in ways that can support human, social and economic activities while conserving inherent ecological functions that are vital to the health of the Great Lakes; and

Be It Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission urges the U.S. Congress and U.S and Canadian federal agencies to explicitly recognize the importance of rivermouths when funding and administering existing environmental restoration programs and when designing and implementing environmental conservation programs, including the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative; and

Be It Further Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission urges the Parties to the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and the International Joint Commission to explicitly address rivermouths and the future of rivermouth ecosystems and the communities that depend on them as part of implementation of Annex 1 of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement; and

Be It Finally Resolved, that the Great Lakes Commission urges the Parties to the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and the International Joint Commission to explicitly address rivermouths as part of an integrated nearshore framework as called for under Annex 2 of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 2012.