



## **Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative Annual Report, August 2004 – July 2005**

### **Introduction**

Mayors and representatives of cities and towns are uniquely situated to participate in regional environmental protection and restoration. They have profound understanding of their communities, they are often ultimately responsible for implementing policies and programs, and they are strongly committed to the health and well being of their citizens and the environment in which they live. As a group, mayors are action oriented, focused on practical applications and tangible results, and are sensitive to political situations. Until recently, despite their great assets, local government representatives were noticeably absent from important decision-making circles in the Great Lakes region. An organization was conceived to address this absence, and to help mayors and municipal officials become involved in activities that serve to protect and restore the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. Local officials have become a significant presence with much hard work, continuing support from the Northeast Midwest Institute, and generous funding from The Joyce Foundation.

In its second year of operations, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative (Cities Initiative) has made significant strides in meeting its founding objectives. The Cities Initiative has established itself as a central organization representing local governments on Great Lakes and St. Lawrence issues, and has earned a seat at several important decision-making tables. The Cities Initiative's positive involvement in policy design and development has raised awareness of the valuable local government perspective, and has advanced municipal interests that protect and restore the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence. The Cities Initiative has also worked to promote information sharing among municipalities by creating a network of Best Practices, available on the organization website.<sup>1</sup> Finally, through diverse activities, the Cities Initiative has encouraged member cities to take an active role in protecting and restoring the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence.

This report outlines some of the major events and accomplishments over the past year, from August 2004 through July 2005.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.greatlakescities.org](http://www.greatlakescities.org), and select "Best Practices"



## **Combining Forces**

Until last spring, many mayors in the Great Lakes and St Lawrence basins were members of two organizations, the Great Lakes Cities Initiative, and the International Association of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Mayors. Both of these organizations sought to give voice to mayors' concerns regarding their shared water resources, and to provide a forum for mayors to identify common challenges and opportunities. Because of the overlap in concerns, a merger of the two organizations was proposed.

On May 26, 2005, the members of the Great Lakes Cities Initiative and the International Association of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Mayors met in Québec City and unanimously agreed to join forces and move forward with one voice. The new

organization is named the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, and, at present, it represents nearly 15 million people in over 80 member cities. The membership is split quite evenly between the United States and Canada.

David Ullrich, formerly the head of the Great Lakes Cities Initiative, serves as the new organization's Executive Director. The Cities Initiative is currently operating out of an office in downtown Chicago. Plans are being put into place to open a second office in Toronto and, in the future, for a third office in Québec.

## **The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration**

In May 2004, President George W. Bush issued an Executive Order calling for the federal government to partner with the Great Lakes States, tribal and local governments, communities and other interests to establish "a Regional Collaboration of National Significance." The members of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) are developing, by consensus, a restoration and protection action plan for the Great Lakes, identifying priority activities and near term goals. A first draft of this action plan was scheduled for release to the public on July 7, 2005, with a final draft to be presented on December 12, 2005. Through the last year,



this process has been one of the most important relating to the future of the Great Lakes.

To represent local governments in the GLRC, Cities Initiative Chairman Mayor Daley of Chicago was invited to sit on the GLRC Executive Committee, along with his Deputy Chief of Staff Rita Athas. Cities Initiative Executive Director David Ullrich has played an active role on the GLRC Subcommittee, and has been involved in the development of all key elements of this effort. In addition, city representatives served as co-chairs on three of the eight strategy teams. Across the board, city leadership in this effort has been strong; cities have helped shape the plan and have pushed to have the work completed on schedule. The July 7<sup>th</sup> release event for the draft Action Plan was co-hosted by Mayor Bergson of Duluth, Minnesota, and Mayor Ross of Superior, with several other city representatives in attendance.

Now that the draft has been released, work must begin on the final version of the Action Plan, as this document will guide much of activity to restore and protect the Great Lakes over the next several years. City involvement, coordinated by the Cities Initiative, will have to remain strong through the rest of this process and through implementation, as well. The Cities Initiative has submitted comments on the Draft, and will work hard for their incorporation into the final report.



### **Annex 2001: Sustainably Managing the Waters of the Great Lakes**

A binational effort is currently underway to develop an accord on the management of the waters of the Great Lakes. The accord, to be signed by the eight Great Lakes states and two Canadian provinces, will be a good faith agreement to control diversions of water from the Great Lakes basin. The Council of Great Lakes Governors

has taken the lead in drafting the documents, with input from a large variety of stakeholders. A revised, but not yet finalized, draft was released for public comment in June 2005.

The Cities Initiative has been working closely with the Council of Great Lakes Governors throughout the drafting process, and has served on the Advisory Committee. The Cities Initiative has prepared comments on the draft documents, and will continue to represent the local perspective on these matters.

A major component of the accord is the measures which will require conservation by cities using the Great Lakes as a water supply. These provisions have important consequences for municipal governments, and the member cities of the Cities Initiative hope to take a leadership role in supporting and implementing these provisions.

## **Sharing Information through Best Practices**

One component of the founding vision of the Cities Initiative is the sharing of information about successful local initiatives that protect and restore the Great Lakes ecosystems while encouraging the vitality of our communities. To meet this objective, the Cities Initiative has created a small, but growing, network of Best Practices. This unique library of information contains documents explaining the planning and implementation of projects and programs, all of which are written by city officials, specifically for use by other cities.

Over the past year, the collection has grown to include 17 documents, with several more currently being written or revised. They were recently organized by category on the website, to make them more accessible.

## **Bringing Mayors Together**

The Cities Initiative is working to understand and expand the ways the organization can encourage member cities to be involved in Great Lakes issues. One of these ways is by bringing mayors of neighboring communities together to discuss their shared interests, and plan for future activities.

In June 2005, the Cities Initiative facilitated a meeting of mayors of Chicago's North shore suburbs. At this meeting, the mayors discussed ways to manage stormwater, prevent beach closures, and obtain grant funding for Great Lakes projects and programs. The Cities Initiative is also working with a group of Northern Michigan mayors to plan a conference in the fall of 2005. Finally, the Cities Initiative is helping a group of Wisconsin mayors organize to draft comments on the recent Annex 2001 draft.

## **Revising the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement**

The process to review and revise the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement has not yet begun, but the International Joint Commissions (IJC) has named Cities Initiative Executive Director David Ullrich to the Public Advisory Committee. This invitation serves to highlight how the Cities Initiative has become a central organization in Great Lakes policy, and is seen to effectively represent local governments. Mr. Ullrich continues to serve on the Great Lakes Water Quality Board, as well.

## **New Initiatives**

Mayor Daley as Chairman is committed to the success of the Cities Initiative, and its continued focus on achieving tangible, meaningful results. As such, he has worked with others to identify four new action items for the near future. First, the Cities Initiative will

work to come together with Great Lakes boaters and fishermen to form a stronger alliance on their shared Great Lakes issues. Second, the Cities Initiative will work to identify and quantify the investments made by cities on activities that help protect and restore the Great Lakes. With this information, the great contributions made by municipal governments can be illustrated, and the case can be made for increased contributions from other sources. Third, model city ordinances will be developed on key issues – including pesticides, fertilizers, household toxics and stormwater management – so that cities can take stronger leadership roles in these areas. Finally, the Cities Initiative will champion water conservation practices in member cities, and work with member cities to implement the Annex 2001 Sustainable Water Management Program. Cities will strive to be the central leaders in this effort to reduce water use. These four new initiatives will allow the Cities Initiative to advance its goals of protection and restoration, while strengthening the organization.

## **Conclusion**

This year has been full of activity in the Great Lakes region, as many organizations and agencies are working towards a healthier, more sustainable ecosystem. The next years will be particularly important ones, as several major efforts to identify needs and coordinate action will be completed and implemented. The practical knowledge and strong commitment of local government officials will bring important wisdom and motivation to the table. By giving mayors a voice, coordinating their activities, and creating opportunities for them to learn from each other, the Cities Initiative will advance the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.