

Remarks Prepared for:
The Honourable Laurel Broten
Minister of the Environment
Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative
Midterm Meeting
April 21, 2006

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Thank you for that kind introduction.

On behalf of our Premier, Dalton McGuinty, I want to welcome those of you who are joining us from across the border.

I'm glad to have this opportunity to speak with you today.

As municipal leaders, you are on the frontlines — representing people living in communities large and small around the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin — north and south, from Ajax to Zion and many points in between.

We all know that clean air, clean water and a healthy environment are essential to people's well-being.

And isn't it fitting that we should meet during Earth Week to recognize the important work being done to help protect and improve our environment?

I want to begin by thanking you for the work you do ... for your dedication to the people of your communities ... and for your commitment to protecting our water.

We are all neighbours — and we share an incredibly rich resource.

One-fifth of the world's total supply of freshwater is in our Great Lakes.

We are all here today because one of the goals we share is protecting our water resources.

World famous Hungarian biochemist Albert Szent-Gyorgi once wrote:

“Water is life's mater and matrix, mother and medium. There is no life without water.”

We all know this as a fundamental truth.

Yet, equally true — we haven't always lived up to our shared responsibility for protecting our water resources.

It's absolutely critical that we do — for our health and well-being ... and for the future of our children and their children.

As a mother of two baby boys — the critical importance of clean water really resonates with me.

No longer can we take the availability and abundance of our water for granted.

No longer can we rely on separate and uncoordinated plans to protect our water.

So, we have to ask ourselves — what can government do in the 21st century to protect the safety and sustainability of our water resources?

First — we need to protect our province's drinking water — from source to tap.

Second — we need to take a long-term, integrated approach to protecting our water quality and quantity.

And third, we need to partner to achieve our shared goals for a healthier environment and stronger communities.

Having clean, safe water is critical to our health and to our quality of life — two key priorities for our government.

We are serious about protecting the quality and quantity of our water resources.

That's why we are developing a comprehensive plan for water.

Since coming to office, our government has introduced a range of progressive measures designed to protect our water sources — and we're coordinating these initiatives with our partners in municipalities and conservation authorities across Ontario.

The centrepiece of our government's water initiatives is the Clean Water Act, which I introduced to the legislature this past December.

This ground-breaking piece of legislation sets prevention — above all else — as its fundamental principle.

The proposed Clean Water Act would give communities the power to take steps to prevent potential threats from becoming serious problems.

It would do this by requiring a source water protection plan for each watershed in Ontario.

Here, Conservation Authorities are poised to take a coordinating role. They manage water resources across political boundaries and in a way that is sensitive to the concerns of the municipalities they work with.

The proposed Clean Water Act is locally driven because we believe that water protection is very much a local issue.

We want to make sure that people in every community across the province have a voice in developing workable, effective solutions.

It's our strong belief that you — the local authorities — are in the best position to determine the protection measures that are needed in your community ...

You can best decide how these measures should be carried out ... who should take responsibility for leading them and how you can best ensure your community has a protection plan that works.

The proposed legislation establishes a source protection framework, along with accompanying regulations and material to help guide your efforts.

And our proposed act will be based on the best available science. If we are going to effectively protect our drinking water, we need to know how much we have in reserve, how it replenishes itself, and what poses a threat to our supply.

I'm pleased to note that in partnership with my colleague David Ramsay, the Minister of Natural Resources, we have embarked upon a systematic water budget analysis working in partnership with conservation authorities.

In addition, my colleague Minister Bartolucci who's responsible for Northern Development and Mines, has introduced an extensive groundwater mapping and inventory project.

We need to get a good grasp on these basics before people can get on with protecting the water resources they have.

Municipalities and conservation authorities also need the resources to design a plan that fits their needs.

That's why we are committing more than \$67 million dollars to fund source water protection research. This funding is going to help communities across Ontario study their water resources.

Today, I'm pleased to announce the first of almost \$10 million dollars in grants — a great deal of which will go to the Great Lakes communities you represent.

Many of your staff have been working with MOE to finalize agreements for the funding your local community will receive and the work we anticipate the funding will support.

We're giving Ontario municipalities, large and small, a greater ability to protect their own water supplies.

Of course, once we have the scientific basis in place, public consultation will be critical.

We want to provide people in your communities the opportunity to be actively involved in protecting their own drinking water.

I've been travelling across the province over the past couple of months ... I've been speaking to people in communities from Sudbury to Windsor and many points in between.

There's one thing everyone I've spoken to agrees upon.

People all across Ontario say that protecting our water has to be a shared responsibility, and that local action is the most effective means of ensuring our water quality and supply.

Tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes estiment que la protection de l'eau est une responsabilité commune, et que c'est en agissant au niveau local que l'on protège le plus efficacement la qualité de l'eau et les réserves d'eau.

Decisions about protecting the quality and quantity water affect everyone.

They can't be made in isolation.

That's why we are strongly committed to working with you to help ensure your water is safe.

As leaders in your communities, you are on the first line of defence when it comes to clean, plentiful, affordable water.

Some 80 per cent of Ontario's population draws its water from the Great Lakes — including most of our largest cities, and our most highly-developed industrial and manufacturing regions.

Clean, safe, affordable drinking water is important to our people's health and it's also one of the cornerstones of our entire region's economic health.

Our businesses and communities can only thrive and prosper by continuing to have access to clean drinking water.

Under the proposed Clean Water Act — communities along the shoreline like Toronto, Hamilton, Sarnia, Windsor, Warton, Terrace Bay, St. Catharines, Kingston and many others in the basin like Orangeville and Sudbury — would be actively involved in source protection planning.

Of course, the Great Lakes are a shared resource.

And because the Great Lakes Basin is such a highly developed area, source protection planning throughout this region is far more complex than in some other parts of Ontario.

But, as in other areas, the proposed Clean Water Act would help communities throughout the Great Lakes Basin develop practical, effective plans to protect municipal drinking water sources.

We all share the need for clean, sustainable water resources just as we all share a stake in ensuring that our water is protected and plentiful.

I've been speaking about how our proposed Clean Water Act affects your communities.

But it is just one part of our government's larger commitment to protecting the environment.

We recognise that to effectively protect and sustain our drinking water resources for the long term requires a broad-based, comprehensive approach.

It also requires a shared commitment from all levels of government.

We're working with our federal partners to help improve and protect the quality and quantity of the water in the Great Lakes through the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem. (COA)

This agreement has been instrumental in improving the quality of Great Lakes waters.

The Ontario government has invested a significant amount — 300 million dollars to date — on the 17 Great Lakes Areas of Concern outlined in the COA.

We are making real progress.

Over the past few years more beaches have been open for swimming ... there are fewer restrictions on eating fish from the Lakes and we've embarked on full scale clean-up of contaminated sediments.

We will continue to partner with Ottawa, with municipalities, with First Nations, industries and people in communities across the Great Lakes ecosystem to clean up our Great Lakes.

We are also strengthening protection for the Great Lakes waters through the Great Lakes Charter Annex agreement. This historic agreement was signed in December of last year with our neighbours in Quebec and the eight Great Lakes states in the U.S.

The Great Lakes Charter Annex virtually bans diverting water from this critical water system.

This agreement also achieved a stronger commitment to water conservation, an increased role for science in decision making and a new commitment to include discussions and input from First Nations communities.

I want to recognize and thank you for the important role you played in championing both these important initiatives.

Many of you have been working tirelessly for many years to bring both the quality and quantity of our Great Lakes waters to the forefront.

These efforts have been instrumental in bringing both the province and the federal government together to find solutions to help the Great Lakes.

I personally want to assure you that I am committed to continuing to work with you to improve and protect our Great Lakes.

As part of our comprehensive water plan includes investing in the pipes and facilities that carry our water and waste.

It's critical we invest in Ontario's infrastructure — upgrade water and sewage systems to help reduce the risk of contaminated drinking water, clean up our beaches, reduce the number of sewage-related water problems and protect our water supplies.

This is especially critical because more than half of our province's pipes are more than 50 years old; many are older than 100 years old.

In our government's recent Budget we announced that \$236 million dollars will be invested in water and other environment-related infrastructure improvements — including funding for municipal water and wastewater and source protection.

These vital infrastructure investments will help us build stronger, healthier communities. It will also help us build a strong foundation for the future.

Our government's plan to safeguard the quality and quantity of our water depends on the commitment and support of many partners. Clean water is critical to the health of all our people, on either side of the border.

Although we are making significant progress on all our clean water initiatives, much more work needs to be done.

I want to recognize the important work you are doing through this organization ... educating, informing, and sharing best practices. .

Let's continue working together ...

By making sure our water is protected and plentiful ... we can ensure people throughout the Great Lakes region have better health, greater prosperity and cleaner, safer communities.

I look forward to continuing to work with you towards our shared goal: healthy, clean, life-sustaining water.

I believe that together we can make a difference.

A difference that will be felt for many, many generations to come.

Thank you.

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