

**Keynote Address by Cameron Davis  
Senior Advisor to the Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
at the Great Lakes & St. Lawrence Cities Initiative  
Annual Conference  
Friday, June 18, 2010  
424 E. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

On behalf of US EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, thank you for the chance to speak with you today. Thanks to Mayor Barrett and Milwaukee for hosting. I would also like to thank Mayor Heartwell<sup>1</sup> for his exemplary service as chair, and congratulate Mayor La Pointe<sup>2</sup> for his ascension to the chairmanship. Additionally, Susan Hedman, EPA's new Region 5 Administrator sends her greetings.

When I stood with Mayor Daley and Dave Ullrich near the shores of Lake Michigan at Montrose Avenue Beach on

---

<sup>1</sup> George Heartwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

<sup>2</sup> Denis (pronounced "Denny") La Pointe is mayor of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Quebec.

July 14, 2003, I heard one resounding message: mayors and municipalities wanted “a seat at the table” for decision making. After all, municipalities were doing a lot of the work. They’re the ones fielding most of the complaints when beaches close, for example. *Now, nearly seven years later, it’s clear cities not only have a place at the table – I sometimes think you’re the ones setting the table...*

A lot has happened over the past seven years. In fact, having worked to protect the Great Lakes for 24 years, I think more has happened in the last seven years for the Great Lakes in particular than in just about any other similar stretch of time over the past 41 years, when Cleveland’s Cuyahoga River caught fire, prompting the first wave of reforms in the U.S.

Also seven years ago, the U.S. Senate Environment Public Works Committee held a hearing and asked a crucial question: “who is the orchestra leader for the Great Lakes?” The U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that with 33 federal and 17 state funded programs unique to the Great Lakes, program coordination and leadership proved to be difficult at best. The GAO, among many other voices, called for a comprehensive, unified strategy with clear lines of accountability for restoring the Great Lakes.<sup>3</sup>

Partially in response, the states, with a heavy assist from the Cities Initiative, worked to launch a comprehensive,

---

<sup>3</sup> GAO, *Great Lakes: An Overall Strategy and Indicators for Measuring Progress Are Needed to Better Achieve Restoration Goals* (April 2003). <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03515.pdf>. The U.S. EPA released a “Great Lakes Strategy” a year before, in 2002, which met with little stakeholder credibility. See, <http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/gls/>.

coordinated campaign to restore the Great Lakes. That work was also unfolding – you guessed it – seven years ago.

## A lot has changed since then:

- A president has been elected who lived with his family just blocks from Lake Michigan and understands the importance of the Great Lakes to the nation and Canada, and is making good on his campaign promises to restore the Great Lakes with the establishment of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.<sup>4</sup>
- EPA is the designated “lead” for coordination of federal agency programs. To that end, U. S. EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson released an Action Plan in February with clear, precise benchmarks for progress and accountability.<sup>5</sup> *Washington Post* government commentator David Broder called the Initiative, a “truly bipartisan and binational enterprise,” and said about the Action Plan upon its release, “In an age of rampant distrust, I can't think of a better way to show that government can work.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://greatlakesrestoration.us/>.

<sup>5</sup> [http://greatlakesrestoration.us/?page\\_id=24](http://greatlakesrestoration.us/?page_id=24).

<sup>6</sup> Broder, David S., “Great Goals for the Great Lakes,” *Washington Post*, Thursday, February 25, 2010, p. A23.

- Municipalities – thanks in large part to the Cities Initiative – are seeing the Great Lakes as part of their jurisdiction, with a critical role in the economic and ecological well-being of the water.
- States individually and through the Great Lakes Commission and Council of Great Lakes Governors are more organized than ever before.
- Tribes and public interest voices, the latter through the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, have brought an increased level of sophistication to restoration efforts, including their own grant program to help community-based restoration efforts.<sup>7</sup> Business has supported the effort as well.

But let's face it. While we've had seven years of good luck ***and*** hard work, we have some very serious, tough challenges facing us. Municipalities have a few challenges to meet and opportunities to seize in the next year or so:

- (1) Our post-industrial cities are still plagued with contaminated sediment that stunts economic growth at a time when we most need it, and still re-circulates poison to the most vulnerable among us, like children, subsistence anglers and women of child-

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.healthylakes.org/implementation-program/priority-area-implementation-program>.

bearing age, who can least afford to be exposed to it. Twenty-three years after the toxic hotspot list was established ONLY ONE of our Areas of Concern wholly in the U.S. or shared with Canada has been removed from the list.<sup>8</sup> We have federal funding ready and waiting to use to help states and cities clean up the rest, but states and cities must come up with a 35% match. That's a good deal in itself. Throw on top of it that that sediment cleanups are like a shot of steroids to post-remediation cities, and there's every reason to dig for matching funds. We will help. States and cities need to use this cleanup funding or the region risks losing it.<sup>9</sup> Just last November, Gov. Doyle, Mayor Barrett and I announced completion of a cleanup along the Kinnickinnic River, which puts us one step closer to de-listing the Milwaukee Area of Concern. Wisconsin has done its part to fund contaminated sediment removal through its state bonding authority under Wisconsin Act 28, which in 2009 provided \$22 million for sediment removal in the Milwaukee AOC. Please work with your states to take advantage of the Legacy Act.

(2) After Great Lakes Restoration Initiative applicants receive funding, one of the smartest things they can do to the extent possible is tell the story of how the Initiative is restoring the Great Lakes. Timely reporting financial and project information will help. And, let me just say, I realize not as many folks as hoped received a green

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/aoc>.

<sup>9</sup> A direct impact of \$211 million based on a \$35 million cleanup was calculated. Braden, J., "The Economic Value of Environmental Cleanup: Contaminants in Waukegan Harbor, Illinois," Report to the City of Waukegan, Northeast-Midwest Institute, & U.S. EPA GLNPO. Rev. August 2003.

light to submit a full application a few weeks ago, but there will be future opportunities.<sup>10</sup> In the meantime, EPA is reaching out on many fronts. For example:

- a. The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District has received an invitation to submit applications for projects. One of these innovative efforts, if funded, will create a subsurface gravel wetland that will reduce flooding, water pollution and costs too the wastewater system. In other words, it wisely uses nature as infrastructure. It will also move the Milwaukee Area of Concern closer to being removed from the toxic hotspot list.<sup>11</sup>
  
- b. Environmental Showcase Community – EPA’s investment in Milwaukee’s 30<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor – where nearly 40% of residents live below poverty level and over 90% are African American - is helping to expand the environmental conversation to underserved communities and ensure that the conversation leads to demonstrable brownfield cleanup and other benefits, including job training and placement through a grant to the Milwaukee Community Service Corps.<sup>12</sup>

(3) Cities are among the leaders investing in the Great Lakes. You recognize that, like a home, you have to take care of the Great Lakes for the Great Lakes to take care of

---

<sup>10</sup> Cities and towns received provisional approval for 16 projects worth \$9 million; Counties 14 projects totaling \$14 million; Special Purpose Districts 21 projects at \$12 million; Other applicants received the nod for 60 projects worth \$34 million. While most of these are NGOs, they often operate within and provide direct benefit to municipalities.

<sup>11</sup> This project is planned for the Green Tree Basin on Lincoln Creek, a tributary of the Milwaukee River, to address six beneficial use impairments in the Milwaukee Estuary Area of Concern. If funded it will hold and filter rainwater, absorb it through plant root systems, and use evapotranspiration to release it to the atmosphere.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/ej/grants/ej-showcase.html> and EPA Fact Sheet 560-F-09-012, January 2009, EPA Brownfields Program.

us. You invest billions of dollars annually.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, President Obama is following through on his commitment with billions of dollars in water infrastructure investment through the recent American Reinvestment & Recovery Act, plus \$475 million in FY10 Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding. But restoring the Great Lakes is a binational job, and it needs to entail a truly binational investment. The United States government is currently engaging with the government of Canada to encourage Canada to increase its investment in the Great Lakes – to a level that is comparable, on a relative basis, to the U.S. commitment and commensurate with Canada’s ecological and economic interests in the Great Lakes. I hope we can count on your support as we engage with Canada on this matter.<sup>14</sup>

**Cities are proving they’re part of the solution – a vital part of the solution. With continued partnership between municipalities and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the region we all live and work in will be much healthier – economically and ecologically – for, as Native American culture urges, the next seven generations. This is in large**

---

<sup>13</sup> “Great lakes & St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, Local Investment in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence;” February 2008; Davey, Monica, “Great Lakes Officials Seek Aid from U.S. and Canada,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2008, p. A15.

<sup>14</sup> The Great Lakes & St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is on record supporting an increased Canadian federal investment in the Great Lakes. See, Resolution 6-2008M (National Clean Water Trust Funds); Statement of Toronto Mayor David Miller, Cities Initiative Press Release, March 4, 2009.

part because of you. I appreciate and know Administrator Jackson appreciates your efforts to set the table – set the direction – for a more livable Great Lakes.

Thank you.