

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Mayors set goal for water conservation, call for immediate action on invasive species

Mayors from U.S. and Canada also urge federal governments to 'modernize' bi-national agreements on Great Lakes, include the St. Lawrence River

Grand Rapids, Michigan, July 12, 2007 – At its fourth annual meeting held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, members of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Cities Initiative today announced significant progress with its Water Conservation Challenge. After only one year, twenty-eight cities have committed to a goal of 15% reduction in water consumption by 2015.

Cities Initiative past-chair Mayor David Miller of Toronto says water conservation is a win-win for cities. “It conserves a precious resource, and it drastically reduces our energy use, which reduces greenhouse gases and saves us money,” Mayor Miller said. “I’m proud of what the Cities Initiative’s water conservation challenge has achieved in such a short time. We have already conserved enough water to fill 85,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Collectively, we intend to change the nature of water consumption in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence basin.”

“As host for this conference, we are pleased that great progress is being made to conserve water, and I am happy that Grand Rapids is one of the cities supporting this initiative,” says George Heartwell, mayor of Grand Rapids. “By bringing together mayors from around the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Basin, we are all working toward a common goal: to improve the quality of our water.”

The mayors attending the Cities Initiative’s annual conference also called on the Canadian and U.S. governments to pass comprehensive invasive species and ballast water control legislation immediately, with mandatory measures for ships carrying ballast water and those with no ballast on board. “There is consensus right across the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence basin, from environment groups to cities, from shippers to fishermen, says newly elected Cities Initiative chair Gary Becker, mayor of Racine, Wisconsin. “We need immediate Canada-U.S. action now on invasive species legislation. There is too much at stake for further delay.”

Responding to the deadline for comments on the review of the Canada-US Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, Toronto Mayor David Miller stated: “We are pleased to see Canadian authorities take action on areas of concern.” We call on the Canadian and U.S. Governments to open the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement for renegotiation. It is twenty years out of date. We need a modernized approach to Great Lakes and St. Lawrence protection.”

Mayor Helen Fotopoulos of Plateau-Mont-Royal added, “We are pleased that the Cities Initiative has endorsed the Quebec Declaration on the St. Lawrence River. Quebec cities are very interested in the bi-national protection of the Great Lakes, as the health of the St. Lawrence is directly linked to the health of the lakes. It may be time to consider a more formal agreement for cooperation in protecting these two bodies of water.”

Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago, the Founding Chair of the organization, commended fellow local officials for the continued leadership. “The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative has become a tremendous asset to regional communities as we move forward on long-term protection and restoration of this important resource,” said Daley.

As the world's largest source of fresh water, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River are essential to the continued vitality of cities, townships, villages and counties along their shores. The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River represent nearly 20 percent of the world's surface freshwater supply and provide drinking water for more than 40 million United States and Canadian citizens.

About The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

Founded by Chicago Mayor Richard Daley in 2003 and headquartered in Chicago, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a binational coalition of mayors and other local officials that works actively with its membership and other levels of government to advance the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. Racine Mayor Gary Becker is the newly elected chairman and director of the coalition and Grand Rapids' Mayor George Heartwell is the Secretary and Director. The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative has nearly 50 members, and a total of 100 participating cities.

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