



Media Backgrounder

Cities' Role in Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Shoreline Protection

As U.S. and Canadian governments come together to renegotiate the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* (GLWQA) for the first time in 22 years, cities are calling for a formal role in renegotiation and implementation of the agreement, in order to bring their strategic perspective and substantial investment power to the table to protect the Great Lakes shoreline.

In its review of the GLWQA, the International Joint Commission (IJC) concluded that the agreement has traditionally focused on the open waters of the Great Lakes, even though much of the pollution originates at the shoreline. This has resulted in beach closings, the collapse of the warm-water coastal aquatic environment, an explosion of nuisance algae, and extensive natural habitat loss. In response, government officials have indicated that the nearshore will receive special attention in this round of negotiations.

Federal, State and Provincial Governments must join Cities in protecting the shoreline

All Great Lakes and St. Lawrence cities make massive investments each year to protect the shoreline. In fact, a survey by the Cities Initiative and the Great Lakes Commission showed that local governments invest \$15 billion annually in the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence.

Despite this enormous effort, the situation at the shoreline is deteriorating in many areas, as a result of population growth, greater urban intensification, the use of fertilizer along the shoreline, and more intense urban runoff due to climate change.

There is an urgent need for support from the federal, provincial and state orders of government. A coordinated approach is needed, where all orders of government support each other's efforts, and priorities are set together to make significant progress in protecting the shoreline.

From a cities' perspective, that means:

- Direct funding to cities from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, with an emphasis on beach sanitary surveys and beach remediation efforts, contaminated sediment and brownfields remediation, the adoption of green infrastructure and water conservation measures to reduce urban runoff and sewage overflows, and increased efforts to keep toxics and other waste like pharmaceuticals out of the Lakes.
- A formal role for cities in the renegotiation of the GLWQA and in the national programs aimed at protecting the coastal areas of the lakes and river, including the Canada-Ontario Agreement on the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem and the St. Lawrence Plan
- A new focus on shoreline protection in the GLWQA, including
 - A coordinated lake-by-lake strategy to reduce nutrients;
 - New support to adopt state-of-the-art green infrastructure and water conservation and efficiency measures, and to modernize stormwater management and pollution control

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- plans to help clean up and reduce the amount of urban runoff and sewage entering the lakes;
- Adopt a long term vision of having beaches open for the entire swimming season, with specific interim goals;
 - Making prevention the first priority of managing aquatic invasive species and improving rapid response to imminent threats;
 - Climate change adaptation actions to reduce the temperature in cities and retrofit infrastructure to withstand extreme weather patterns.
- Financial support to meet commitments in the GLWQA and to support ongoing work by municipalities at the shoreline.

Cities protecting the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Shoreline

Cities are already at the forefront of protecting the shoreline of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. Here are a few examples of cities' initiatives:

Chicago: Chicago is a national leader in green roofs and has over 7 million square feet of green roof installed or permitted. Chicago has expanded the urban forest, with a 50% increase in tree canopy over the last 15 years to a current canopy of 17.2% (25,800 acres). Chicago's Stormwater Management Ordinance encourages green infrastructure solutions and has led to the capture of over 10 million gallons of water and the reduction of 43 acres of impervious surface since its inception in 2008. Chicago's Green Alley Program has installed over 100 green alleys to date, using cutting-edge permeable pavement technologies. The City also encourages stormwater best management practices such as disconnecting downspouts, rain gardens, cisterns, and has distributed over 6,000 55-gallon rain barrels to residents.

Grand Rapids: Since the late 1980s, the City of Grand Rapids has actively worked towards eliminating its combined sewer overflows (CSOs) by separating its sewage and sanitary sewer system. Grand Rapids has reduced CSO volumes by over 11 billion gallons. Work continues in Grand Rapids, and all CSOs will be eliminated within the next ten years. To date, Grand Rapids has invested \$210 million to separate sewers, and will spend an additional \$50 million to complete the work.

Toronto: The City of Toronto passed a Pesticide By-law in May 2003, which significantly restricted pesticide use on public and private property. It permitted only the use of residential lawn care products that pose little or no health or environmental risks. As a result of Toronto's leadership, the province of Ontario passed a provincial ban on the use of cosmetic pesticides, which took effect April 22, 2009 so that all communities can benefit from fewer pesticides entering the stormwater system and running off into the lakes.

Please visit our website at www.glslcities.org/projects.htm for more on municipal environmental initiatives.

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