



PRESS RELEASE

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Mayors Green the Urban Landscape *Local action drives nearshore protection across the Basin*

December 2, 2011 (Chicago) – At their meeting in Chicago today, mayors of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative from the United States and Canada committed to actions that will protect and restore the largest body of surface freshwater in the world by greening the urban landscape within their cities. Green urban restoration efforts are necessary to protect the rich and sensitive aquatic systems in the nearshore area of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence and its tributaries. These projects also contribute to the economic well-being and quality of life in the cities and region as a whole.

The mayors passed a resolution committing to taking action to protect and restore the Lakes and River by promoting green urban restoration. Efforts like restoring wildlife habitat and wetlands, naturalizing waterfronts, and incorporating green infrastructure into the urban landscape bring many positive results. As in places like Chicago, these greening efforts help to improve the environmental health of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River, while also generating economic benefits by attracting visitors and tourists and creating jobs, and fostering quality of life benefits for residents.

“I am committed to the restoration and revitalization of the Chicago River as the City’s next recreational frontier, as well as the protection of the Lake Michigan shoreline,” said Mayor Rahm Emanuel of Chicago, the newest member to the Cities Initiative Board of Directors, and host of the meeting. “The lake and the river are vibrant natural resources in Chicago, and are essential to the quality of life and economic prospects of all of our city. I look forward to maximizing their accessibility for both residents and tourists to enjoy.”

In its 15th biennial report, the International Joint Commission concluded that nearshore water quality problems are serious in most areas of the Great Lakes, and that “the need to address them is clear”. “By re-integrating the natural environment into our urban centers, we can reduce run-off entering our waters and at the same time make our cities even more desirable places to live, work, and raise a family,” said Mayor Brian McMullan of St. Catharines, Chair of the Cities Initiative.

A 2008 report by the Cities Initiative and the Great Lakes Commission, entitled *Local Investment in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River*, found that local governments invest more than \$1.5 billion annually in efforts to green the urban landscape, including beach and shoreline work, brownfields cleanup, Smart Growth planning and implementation, and greenspace protection. This investment is seeing positive returns.

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Brian McMullan, Mayor of St. Catharines, Chair

Tom Barrett, Mayor of Milwaukee, Vice-Chair

Régis Labeaume, President of Québec Metropolitan Community, Secretary/Treasurer



“Greening and restoring urban habitat can result in positive economic benefits for our cities,” said Mayor Tom Barrett of Milwaukee, Vice Chair of the organization. “As with our Menomonee Valley Industrial Center and Community Park project, which incorporates a number of habitat restoration elements, we’ve been able to create jobs and draw people to a part of the city to live in, work in, and enjoy that they wouldn’t have ventured to otherwise.”

A key element of efforts to green urban areas is helping to reconnect people to their environment and city. The mayors feel this is one of the best results of their efforts. “Connecting our citizens to the city and the natural environment is a very important part of my job as mayor,” said Mayor Denis Lapointe of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, past Chair of the Cities Initiative. “It is this connection to the great waters at our doorstep that motivates us and provides the support we need to protect and restore what makes our cities great.”

In addition to their own investments in restoration projects, cities around the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River have benefited over recent years from additional funding and partnerships with other government agencies. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative in the United States and the Canada Ontario Agreement and St. Lawrence Plan in Canada have helped advance urban habitat restoration in a number of cities. The mayors recognize this support and encourage continued partnership and investment among all orders of government to further green the urban landscape and protect and restore the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.

More information on Great Lakes and St. Lawrence cities’ green urban restoration efforts and the resolution can be found at www.glslcities.org/news/news.cfm.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a binational coalition of over 80 mayors and other local officials that works actively with federal, state, tribal, first nation and provincial governments and other stakeholders to advance the protection, restoration and promotion of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin.

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