



2012 Prebudget Consultations
Presentation to Minister of Finance Dwight Duncan
Presented by Sarah Rang, Ontario Program Director
Tuesday, December 13, 2011

Minister Duncan, thank you for this opportunity to present our recommendations on investment and job creation in the Great Lakes, on behalf of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative.

The Cities Initiative is a coalition of over 80 Canadian and US mayors, who collectively work towards the protection, restoration and promotion of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. We represent over 14 million people from communities large and small. Each year, municipalities in Canada and the US invest \$15 billion in Great Lakes and St. Lawrence protection and restoration activities.

From your home town of Windsor, you know first hand the value of the Great Lakes, the largest source of fresh water in the world. The Ontario Government has estimated that \$7 billion worth of Ontario's economic wealth is associated with the Great Lakes. Maintaining, improving and promoting the quality of the lakes attract businesses, skilled workers and tourists alike. The US Brookings Institution showed that there is a 2:1 return on Great Lakes investment. We also know that investing in water projects can be good job creators. In short, investment in the Great Lakes is in the strategic interest of the province of Ontario.

As the jurisdiction with more Great Lakes shoreline than any other, and more than one third of all Great Lakes water, Ontario has a particular responsibility to protect this global asset. We congratulate the Province for recognising this, and proposing a Great Lakes Protection Act in the recent Speech from the Throne.

Through the Great Lakes Protection Act, and in collaboration with the Federal Government in a renegotiated Canada-Ontario Agreement, and working in partnership with municipalities, the Cities Initiative recommends that Ontario adopt a long term plan for the Great Lakes, with a focus on three priority areas:

- 1) improvements to nearshore water quality, which include Climate change adaptation measures, stormwater and waste water improvements
- 2) reducing algae through reduced per-lake nutrient concentrations, and
- 3) improving beaches and other shoreline recreational opportunities to attract tourist dollars to the Great Lakes region.

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The International Joint Commission has identified urban and agricultural run off as a principal source of pollutants to nearshore waters. Stormwater has always been the poor 3rd cousin to drinking water and wastewater, and it is time for us to work together to improve our financing and management of stormwater to reduce this important source of pollution to our Lakes. This should include financing of green infrastructure. Its time for us to finance infrastructure to meet the new needs of the 21st century, and to get multiple benefits out of the same investment.

The second focus area, reducing algae is becoming one of the most urgent issues on the lower lakes as the increase in nutrient loadings results in enormous algal blooms, creating 'dead zones' for aquatic life, and which, in some forms are toxic to humans. This summer, Lake Erie had the highest concentration of toxic algae ever recorded. Algae is not just an environmental problem, it has large economic costs. Algae build-up on the shoreline has a devastating impact on residential and recreational property values. And industries and municipalities are forced to spend millions of dollars a year to declog their water intakes from algae. Fishing businesses on Lake Erie are reporting large losses due to the problem algae this summer.

Canada and the US are expected to set new nutrient loading targets for the lakes under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement currently under negotiation. Meeting these will require a substantial investment in sewage treatment upgrades, stormwater controls and reduced agricultural runoff.

As families stay closer to home in these economic times, we encourage greater provincial investment in our beautiful beaches, recreational trails and waterfronts along the Lakes.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with you and your colleagues to ensure that the Great Lakes Protection Act meets these specific goals and also fosters jobs. It can only do so with appropriate financial backing. This is not a job for the province alone; it will require all of us, provincial, municipal and federal governments to commit sufficient resources to ensure the long term sustainability of the Great Lakes.

We can learn from our neighbours. The Quebec government has just negotiated a 15 year deal with the federal government to clean up and restore the St. Lawrence. In the next five years, the Quebec and federal governments will commit \$70 million. The agreement is integrated with existing provincial legislation to protect the St. Lawrence. We can also look to the south, with the US Great Lakes Restoration Initiative investment of \$475 million in 2009 and over \$300 million in 2010 which is driving jobs and improvements. The US has recently announced over \$6 million of funding under this program for cleanup projects that will each employ at least 20 unemployed people, resulting in ecological improvements and training for the unemployed.

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To begin this Great Lakes turn around in these difficult times, calls for clear and focused strategies. First, it is essential that the basic building blocks of improvement, investing in infrastructure, particularly green infrastructure, continue to be supported.

Second, the province needs to continue to address the three priority areas identified by the Cities Initiative, including specific targets outlined in a renegotiated Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and reflected in the Canada-Ontario Agreement on the Great Lakes.

And third, it is essential that the 2012 budget include a substantial increase in financial support for local initiatives to improve the nearshore environment. The Cities Initiative proposes a \$30 million fund for Great Lakes nearshore protection, available to all Great Lakes communities, for funding for local non-infrastructure initiatives to improve nearshore quality. This would help make projects like beach improvements, wetland construction, boat ramps, naturalizing waterfronts and incorporating green infrastructure into urban cities a reality. Clear goals and criteria for project funding would be defined through the Canada-Ontario Agreement on the Great Lakes. All three of these actions would help implement the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present the recommendations on the Ontario 2012 budget. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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