

**Remarks of
Benjamin H. Grumbles
Assistant Administrator
Office of Water
US Environmental Protection Agency**

**Gearing Up for Great Progress:
Our Great Lakes Regional Collaboration and
Your Lake Ontario Coastal Initiative**

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Luncheon Keynote

Introduction

Thank you so much for your hospitality, and most importantly, your commitment to Lake Ontario's environmental and economic health. I want to thank the sponsors and supporters who are making this happen and who will make a difference after this specific conference ends. There's a saying in Washington, D.C. that "after all is said and done, more is said than done." I trust you will work to make sure that's not the case for New York's North Coast. I can assure you EPA and the Bush Administration are committed to making unprecedented progress in protecting and restoring the Great Lakes ecosystem. It is a priority. Our success, like yours, will depend on collaboration, sound science, efficiencies, and results.

Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

Earth is the water planet. Water covers 72% of its surface and 100% of its future. The Great Lakes – Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario – form the largest surface freshwater system on the Earth, approximately 20% of the planet's supply. More than 30 million people live in the Great Lakes basin, and the daily activities of these people, from the water consumed to the waste returned, directly affects the Great Lakes environment. At the same time, we know local actions help determine the health and security of our watersheds. Former EPA Administrator Christie Whitman defined watersheds as "communities connected by water" – and not just during floods.

Executive Order to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes.

May 18, 2004, marked the beginning of an exciting new opportunity to further protect and restore the Great Lakes. It was on that date that President Bush signed Executive Order 13340 creating a Great Lakes Interagency Task Force and promoting establishment of a “regional collaboration of national significance” for the Great Lakes.

Great Lakes Interagency Task Force

The Executive Order created the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, in part, to coordinate the development of consistent Federal policies, strategies, projects and priorities for restoring and protecting the Great Lakes. In other words, the Executive Order directed the Federal government to get its own house in order as part of the larger Collaboration effort. EPA Administrator Steve Johnson, a career EPA employee and scientist, is leading the effort. And he’s no stranger to the Great Lakes. He’s spent the last year and a half working with Mike Leavitt, his predecessor, specifically on the President’ Great Lakes Initiative.

The Task Force is focusing on three important action.

First, the Task Force will be delivering a report to the President by May 31st summarizing its progress to date in implementing the Executive Order and providing any recommendations that would further federal government efforts to protect and restore the Great Lakes.

Second, the Task Force's Regional Working Group, which consists of the regional directors of the Task Force's member agencies, is putting together a matrix of current and potential multi-agency projects in the Great Lakes Basin. This matrix, which will be updated periodically, is a tool to help identify further opportunities for federal agency coordination.

Finally, the Task Force is collecting data on the scope and breadth of its funding and programs targeted in the Great Lakes Basin, as of fiscal year 2004. This information will be included in the Report to the President, and will help highlight the federal commitment to the Great Lakes.

This commitment by the federal government to the Great Lakes is evident even in advance of having in hand the information being compiled by the Interagency Task Force. For example, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is leading an interagency effort to help prevent the migration of invasive species into the Great Lakes by constructing electrical barriers on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. The Corps has worked through the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force to coordinate with Federal agencies on this critical project. Construction of the first stage is scheduled to be completed in June 2005, and legislation passed in 2004 authorizing construction of the second stage of the project.

You also can look to the President's FY06 budget request and find several examples of increasing federal involvement in the Great Lakes. The President has requested full funding, or \$50 million, for the Great Lakes Legacy Act, more than double the level of funding from last year. This funding, if approved by Congress,

will help accelerate progress in cleaning up contaminated sediments in areas of concern for the Great Lakes.

In addition, the budget request includes an additional \$500K for EPA's Office of Research and Development for invasive species research in the Great Lakes.

The President's FY 2006 budget request also includes language that "NOAA will utilize \$1.5M to establish a Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Program emphasizing protection and restoration of NOAA trust resources at the watershed scale within the Great Lakes Areas of Concern."

In addition to its focus on internal coordination, and on implementing the more than 140 federal programs in the Great Lakes basin, the Task Force also participates in the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration. Its interests and views are represented by EPA, whose Administrator chairs both the Task Force and the Collaboration's Executive Committee.

The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration

Turning to the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, as you may know, the Collaboration has 3 purposes: 1) to develop a Great Lakes Restoration and Protection Strategy that builds on existing collaborative efforts already in place; 2) to serve as a forum to address near term regional issues; and 3) to serve as a forum to coordinate and enhance implementation of the Strategy once it is completed.

I believe that this Collaboration offers an unprecedented opportunity to move forward collectively and strategically to protect and restore the Great Lakes.

The collaboration process that was kicked off at the Conveners' Meeting in Chicago last December brought together key players from all levels of government, including federal, state, local, Tribal and Congressional representatives, to collaboratively work together and with all members of the Great Lakes community toward a common goal of protecting and restoring the Great Lakes ecosystem in order to address new and continuing challenges and ensure a healthy ecosystem for future generations.

In signing the Great Lakes Declaration at the Conveners' Meeting, those representatives, including, I understand, someone on behalf of this organization, formally pledged their support for a collaborative process to further restore and protect the Great Lakes ecosystem, and that process is well underway, as you know.

EPA's underlying principles focus on collaboration, sound science, efficiencies, and results. As Mike Leavitt says, "Solutions transcend political boundaries." Sustainable approaches to multi-jurisdictional challenges don't happen by accident. They require upfront planning, hard work, and full participation by key stakeholders and beneficiaries. Sound science and technology are critical as well. Public and private investment in research and cutting-edge technology provide the foundation for smart decisions and effective problem solving. Water monitoring, pathogen detection, and treatment of wastewater and ballast water are just a few examples of important areas for the Great Lakes. And of

course, we all have to focus on results – i.e., environmental outcomes, not just outputs or bureaucratic program “beans.”

The eight Issue Area Strategy Teams established at the Conveners Meeting have been meeting since December to examine specific issues and provide recommendations to the Collaboration on those issues. Some of you may be members of those teams, and if so, you know what a tremendous undertaking the Strategy Teams have been involved in. They are addressing a number of important issues, many of which are of direct relevance to you and your work here in Lake Ontario:

- 1) Nonpoint sources including agricultural practices, erosion, nutrients, coastal nonpoint pollution issues, stormwater runoff, and conservation reserve programs.
- 2) Persistent Bioaccumulative Toxics including ways to reduce toxic substances entering the Lakes, pollution prevention, new chemicals of concern, air deposition, and fish consumption advisories.
- 3) Invasive Species including ballast water management, the Illinois carp barriers and exploration of other potential barriers, rapid response protocols and strategies, prevention and mitigation procedures, outreach and education, and research.
- 4) Habitat and Species including the restoration and protection of habitat, native species, fisheries, coastal areas, wetlands, healthy forests, the natural hydrologic cycles, and biodiversity.

- 5) Area of Concern Restoration and Contaminated Sediments including restoring the health of AOCs through the remedial action program, cleaning up contaminated sediments through the implementation of the Great Lakes Legacy Act and other authorities, and delisting AOCs.
- 6) Indicators and Information including monitoring, data standards, reporting of environmental information, Great Lakes Integrated Coastal Observing System (GLICOS), Lakewide Management Plans (LaMPs), and the State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference (SOLEC) process. This component is living proof of the vision and value of the Center for Environmental Information.
- 7) Sustainable Development including transportation, brownfields, land-use and preservation practices, waterfront restoration, and economic viability as a function of environmental and natural resource protection.
- 8) Coastal Health including beach closings, combined sewer overflows (CSO), sanitary sewer overflows (SSO), bacteria and pathogen contamination.

I attended a meeting in Traverse City, Michigan last week at which we reviewed and discussed rough drafts provided by the Strategy Teams. Each team has done tremendous work to date in putting together suites of recommendations to address their specific areas. They are now beginning the hard work of prioritizing those recommendations for the consideration of the Collaboration's Executive

Committee, which is charged with developing the comprehensive restoration and protection Strategy. We had a very good exchange in Traverse City, and I believe we are well on our way to producing a meaningful Strategy for the Great Lakes.

The success of these teams, and ultimately the Strategy itself, depends on a broad level of engagement from all interests in the Great Lakes region. I believe that engagement is in place, with each team consisting of more than 150 members representing a true cross-section of the Great Lakes community, including the environmental community, the private sector, academia, and representatives from federal, state, local and tribal governments.

This level of engagement from the full complement of Great Lakes interests needs to be sustained over the course of the next eight months in order for the Collaboration to be successful in its efforts to produce a comprehensive, coordinated Great Lakes Strategy.

In addition to being a member of a Strategy Team, there are other opportunities for you to become involved in the Collaboration process.

Following the release of the draft Strategy in early July, there will be a 60-day public comment period. In addition, the Collaboration will be holding five public meetings in the Great Lakes Basin during the 60-day public comment period in order to obtain additional public input to the draft Strategy. We're still working on the details of those public meetings, such as locations and exact dates, but I can safely say they will help provide excellent opportunities for all members of the Great Lakes community to be heard.

After the public comment period closes and the public meetings have concluded, the Executive Committee and the Strategy Teams will engage in a process to address comments and produce the final strategy by the end of the year. My expectation is that the Strategy Teams will maintain their broad base of members through the end of the year in order to help ensure that the voice of the Great Lakes community is heard throughout the duration of the collaborative process.

It is my hope that you will remain engaged as well as you move forward with your own efforts here in Lake Ontario. What you are doing here is an important piece of the overall picture in the Great Lakes restoration and protection effort, and our ultimate success depends on coordinating our efforts and building on each others' good work.

Closing

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, and to learn about your efforts to save New York's North Coast. Like elements of this great ecosystem itself, we are all connected. By harnessing the power of collaboration, and by utilizing our shared commitment to a cleaner, healthier Great Lakes, I am confident we can accomplish our goal of developing a comprehensive strategy to restore and protect the Lakes – a strategy that will serve us all greatly – globally, regionally, and locally.