

Great Lakes Regional Collaboration  
Summit II  
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Chicago, Illinois

Remarks by Bob Taft  
Governor, State of Ohio  
Co-Chair, Council of Great Lakes Governors

Thank you, Congressman Ehlers.

I am delighted to join you, Congressman Kirk, Mayor Daley, Tribal Chairman Ettawageshik, Ohio EPA Administrator Koncelik, and US EPA Administrator Johnson today to release this strategy for protecting and restoring the Great Lakes.

And I want to thank all of you here who were part of the strategy teams. It is your willingness to work together for the benefit of the Great Lakes that has brought us to this point.

This new chapter in Great Lakes restoration began when Congressman Ehlers, Senators Mike DeWine of Ohio and Carl Levin of Michigan, and other members of the region's Congressional delegation envisioned a significant restoration project for the Great Lakes, similar to efforts underway in the Everglades and Chesapeake Bay.

They enlisted the leadership of the Great Lakes Governors to define priorities for this important work.

As Chairman of the Council of Great Lakes Governors, I convened the Great Lakes Priorities Initiative.

And in October 2003, the Governors released nine priorities for the Great Lakes.

The first of the Governors' priorities is ensuring sustainable use of our water resources.

Tomorrow in Milwaukee, we will sign historic agreements to implement the Great Lakes Charter Annex.

I want to recognize Sam Speck, director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, for his leadership in negotiating the terms of the Annex among the many interested parties. These agreements will secure both environmental and economic stability in the region by protecting our most precious natural resource from diversion outside the region.

The remaining eight priorities form the organizing principle of the strategy that we have come together to release today. But the heart of this document comes from the real collaboration that has taken place among the 1,500 individuals who put aside their parochial interests and engaged in a remarkable cooperative effort to recommend key steps to make our Great Lakes great again.

It is this spirit of collaboration that will carry us forward on the next steps toward implementation.

The Great Lakes comprise 20 percent of the fresh surface water on the planet and I thank President Bush for recognizing the Great Lakes as a “national treasure” in his Executive Order of May 2004.

That Executive Order created the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force and called for a regional collaboration of national significance on behalf of the Great Lakes.

A year ago, at the historic first Great Lakes Regional Collaboration summit, there was a recognition and an expectation that the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes would require not just a plan of action, but also the sustained investment of existing and new resources over an extended period of time.

Thus far, the Federal Interagency Task Force has chosen to emphasize increased efficiency with regards to existing programs and resources as the tools to restore the Great Lakes and I want to thank Administrator Johnson for the steps he has announced today.

The States, Tribes, Cities and our advisors on the Congressional Task Force agree that these are important elements – but we also believe that all parties, including the federal government, must make additional investment in the Great Lakes if we are to reach the goals presented in this strategy.

There needs to be a sense of urgency.

Just last week, prominent scientists studying the Great Lakes concluded that without a large scale protection and restoration initiative, the lakes could suffer irreversible damage.

Alfred Beeton, the former director of the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, said the Great Lakes are near “the tipping point.”

Recognizing this challenge and the reality of limited resources, the Great Lakes Governors and Mayors, in consultation with tribal representatives and the Congressional Great Lakes Task Force, have developed a specific list of near term actions that we believe will give us a good start on implementation of the plan.

This list calls for new investment by the federal government of about \$300 million in the next budget, with matching investment by state and local governments and private partners.

High priority items include passage of the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act and funding to complete and operate the carp barrier in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal – a small investment compared to the extensive economic and environmental damage the Asian Carp could cause in the Great Lakes.

We are also seeking funding to restore wetlands, expand buffer strips to reduce run-off, reduce sewer overflow and remove toxic sediments, and we would contribute financially to those projects as well.

Governor Doyle and I, as Co-chairs, and Mayor Daley, as Chair of the Cities Initiative, sent a letter today to the President presenting our near term proposals. Despite the current demands on federal, state, local and tribal budgets, we can begin work on the highest priorities identified in the strategy.

If we hesitate to spend money, we will lose time – and we do not have time to lose.

As an example of what we can accomplish together, I want to thank Administrator Johnson for approving Legacy Act funds to remove contaminated sediment from the Ashtabula River.

Federal investment in this project, which is one of the Areas of Concern, is being matched by private dollars and \$7 million from the State of Ohio. This is a model for the way in which we must all come together to advance the goals of the Collaboration.

I hope to see many more such cooperative projects as we complete the planning phase of our work and move forward to make Great Lakes restoration a reality.

Thank you.