

**Governor Bob Taft's Remarks  
Great Lakes Regional Collaboration  
Chicago, Illinois  
December 3, 2004**

Thank you, Administrator Leavitt. Good morning.

I'm honored to be here with Jim Doyle, my fellow Co-Chair for the Council of Great Lakes Governors.

And I thank all of you, our partners, for being here to create the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration.

The Great Lakes unite all of us who represent the 40 million citizens living within reach of their shores. They are part of who we are. And they are a tremendous asset for our region's future, if we can restore them fully and protect them for generations to come.

Lake Erie forms Ohio's northern shore! It's vital to our recreation and tourism industries, to our supply of drinking water, to our economy as a whole, and to our quality of life.

And so for us in Ohio, this is truly an historic day.

By signing the Declaration, we are affirming the importance of the Great Lakes as a national resource and global treasure, and through this effort, we'll educate the entire country about the compelling need for a significant national investment in the long-term sustainability of the Lakes.

With the creation of this Collaboration, we begin a new chapter in our efforts to restore and protect the Great Lakes, an effort that builds on steps already taken!

The States and Provinces have individually pursued strong remedial actions, including phosphorus bans and shoreline protections.

The support agencies here today have funded important research and restoration projects. And many individual citizens have shown their commitment to Great Lakes restoration by participating in Remedial Action Plan groups and membership in environmental advocacy organizations.

This work, and the leadership of the Congressional Great Lakes Task Force, formed the basis on which the Great Lakes Governors developed nine fundamental priorities for the restoration and protection of the Lakes. Those priorities, in turn, have been endorsed by the Great Lakes mayors, and now form the organizing principle for the teams that will begin work today on a comprehensive restoration strategy.

I want to thank Ohio's EPA Director Chris Jones for heading up the Governor's Great Lakes Priorities Project.

I want to recognize also Ohio's Natural Resources Director Sam Speck for his role in leading the effort to implement our first priority: ensuring the sustainable use of the waters of the Lakes through the Great Lakes Charter Annex.

But why is this day so significant?

It's because we are all here together. Local officials, state officials, two federal governments, the tribal nations, the environmental groups – for the first time, we are all committed to working together on a strategy to achieve our shared goals. For the first time, we will demonstrate to the Congress and the nation that the Great Lakes community speaks with one voice. For the first time, we will make the restoration of the Great Lakes a national priority.

I want to thank President Bush for his commitment to the Great Lakes by issuing the Executive Order that created the federal interagency task force.

And I thank Administrator Leavitt for his leadership in bringing together the federal agencies involved in the Great Lakes and for taking the initiative to work with us on this Collaboration.

But in truth, it's all of us who are creating the Collaboration, through the work we will do in the coming months to forge a clear, coherent, compelling vision for the protection and restoration of one of God's greatest gifts to us who live here on this planet we call the Earth.

Thank you.

###

*Written text may not reflect the speech exactly as delivered by Governor Taft.*