

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

**STATEMENT OF
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Good Morning, Senator. I am Tom Skinner, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Region V Administrator and the National Program Manager for the Great Lakes. I am pleased to be here today to discuss our efforts to restore and protect the Great Lakes, the largest freshwater system on earth.

INTRODUCTION

I want to first take this opportunity to highlight mechanisms that EPA has developed to carry out Great Lakes priority setting and planning. Over the past few years, we have built a sound structure for achieving a collective vision of comprehensive ecosystem management for the Great Lakes.

We have a good understanding of the major environmental problems facing the Great Lakes today. In recognition of these problems, the FY 2004 President's Budget increased EPA's Great Lakes funding by \$15 million, nearly doubling FY 2003 levels. These additional funds will support the contaminated sediment projects newly authorized by the Great Lakes Legacy Act.

Efforts to develop the Great Lakes Strategy 2002, combined with information from the State of the Lakes Ecosystem reports have provided much valuable

information and experience. EPA continues to gather more information on the condition of the Great Lakes, as part of the Agency's scientific research program. For example, we are working to develop integrated methods of detecting and predicting the spread of new invasive species introduced into the Great Lakes. We are also developing more rapid methods for measuring beach water quality (to get results in 1-2 hours, rather than the current 24 to 48 hours) and improving our protocols for monitoring, our goal being to better understand the relationship between water quality and its health impacts on beach goers.

What we do know is that:

- ▶ Invasive species in the Great Lakes, now in excess of 160, are causing serious economic and ecosystem health impacts. It is virtually certain more invasives will enter the system in future years.
- ▶ Toxic contamination has triggered more than 1,500 current fish advisories in the Great Lakes Basin. Cleaning up contaminated sediments and addressing inputs of toxic chemicals to the Lakes are key to solving this problem.
- ▶ Record numbers of beach closings have occurred in the Great Lakes in recent years due to nonpoint source runoff and sewage problems.
- ▶ A "dead zone" of water lacking oxygen has appeared in Lake Erie, impacting aquatic life, and indicating the health of the lake may be compromised.

The Great Lakes Strategy 2002, working along with Lakewide Management Plans and Remedial Action Plans, identifies these problems and form a complementary framework for current and future efforts to address them. A suite of goals and measures in the Strategy are guiding governmental partners towards solving these problems. Some of the most important goals are:

- ▶ By 2005, clean-up and delist 3 Areas of Concern, with a cumulative total of 10 by 2010.

- ▶ By 2007, reduce concentrations of PCBs in lake trout and walleye by 25%.
- ▶ By 2007, establish 300,000 acres of buffer strips in agricultural lands using non-regulatory federal and state programs.
- ▶ By 2010, 90% of Great Lakes beaches will be open 95% of the season.
- ▶ By 2010, restore or enhance 100,000 acres of wetlands in the Basin.
- ▶ By 2010, substantially reduce the further introduction of invasive species, both aquatic and terrestrial, to the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem.
- ▶ Accelerate the pace of sediment remediation, leading to the clean-up of all designated sites by 2025.

CHALLENGES IN RESTORING THE GREAT LAKES

Some of the challenges in restoring the Great Lakes are:

- ▶ The sheer geographic size of the system, and the range of problems present in the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes also require binational cooperation to achieve results.
- ▶ Coordination with numerous partners and jurisdictions -- Eight Great Lakes States, over ten Federal agencies and over 30 Indian Tribes are responsible for carrying out environmental and natural resource management programs to protect and restore the Great Lakes. Many other key organizations such as the Council of Great Lakes Governors, the Great Lakes Commission, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, and the International Joint Commission (IJC) also have extremely important roles.
- ▶ Public involvement -- the very nature and value of the Great Lakes as a natural resource means many non-governmental partners and individuals from all sectors of society are interested in the Lakes' health.
- ▶ Potential for duplication of efforts. There are currently a number of plans and planning efforts for the Great Lakes that address different geographic scales. It is important to coordinate to ensure efforts do not cause unnecessary confusion, wasted resources, or lead to "reinventing the wheel."

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

It will be important as we move forward to continue to work with the Council of Great Lakes Governors to ensure that the Governors' priorities are emphasized and that duplication of effort is avoided. The Great Lakes Strategy 2002, Lakewide Management Plans, and Remedial Action Plans, can serve as the starting point for this work.

In closing, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I look forward to playing a key role working with our partners to continue progress on Great Lakes restoration efforts.

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