

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

**STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**May 20, 2004**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Tom Skinner, EPA's Great Lakes National Program Manager. I welcome the opportunity to discuss with you this morning some of our efforts with regard to the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes hold 20% of the world's surface freshwater. They are in the middle of one of the world's most productive agricultural areas. Commercial ships from all over the world ply their waters. They are used for recreation, including boating, fishing and swimming. More than one-tenth of the U.S. population and one-quarter of the population of Canada call the Great Lakes Basin home. The Great Lakes touch an incredible number of this nation's citizens.

As a result of all of these factors, the Great Lakes are faced with a myriad of problems, from invasive species to wastewater discharges. Solving each of these problems would be complex even for a single entity, but the Great Lakes border eight states, two countries, and many communities. Local, tribal, state, provincial and federal governments in the U.S. and Canada share responsibility for regulating the Lakes. Numerous non-governmental organizations also play important roles in Great Lakes research and program implementation.

Over the past 25 years, at every level of government, programs have been created to care for the Great Lakes. In the federal government alone there are approximately 140 programs. As recently as last week, the Great Lakes Governors outlined their priorities in a letter to the House and Senate Appropriations Chairmen and

Ranking Members. Some have called for an “orchestra leader” for the Great Lakes, but it is more than that. To use a metaphor: we have lots of musicians, but we need more harmony.

On Tuesday, May 18, 2004, President Bush signed an Executive Order intended to foster that harmony. The President’s order has two main elements. First, it creates a means to coordinate federal activities on the Great Lakes by creating a high-level federal task force consisting of the Cabinet secretaries of the appropriate federal agencies and appointing the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency to lead it. The Great Lakes National Program Office of EPA will provide staff support for this group.

Second, the order initiates the creation of a “regional collaboration of national significance” to bring hundreds of regional, state, local, tribal and other interests together for the purpose of jointly providing strategic direction for Great Lakes restoration and protection.

Successful regional collaborations of national significance should not be dominated by the federal government. The federal government’s role is that of convener and full participant. The Federal government supports local and regional efforts to address the issues facing the Great Lakes and encourages community stewardship.

With respect to the harmonization of federal efforts on the Great Lakes, yesterday EPA Administrator Leavitt convened at the White House the first meeting of the Task Force. At that meeting, the Task Force created the Great Lakes Regional Working Group called for in the President’s order, which I will chair in my role as the EPA’s Great Lakes National Program Manager.

With respect to the regional collaboration, on Tuesday in Chicago Governor Leavitt joined Governor Bob Taft of Ohio, in his capacity as Chairman of the Great Lakes Governors, and Mayor Richard M. Daley, in his capacity as Chairman of the Great Lakes Cities Initiative, to discuss the organization of a broad-based regional collaboration. It is only through the transparent consideration of the rich diversity of perspectives surrounding this international treasure that we can truly accelerate remediation, restoration, protection and conservation.

Because this effort is a collaborative one, the answer to many of the natural questions regarding this effort will have to grow out of discussions between the participants. The Governor, Mayor and the Administrator will create a small work group to organize a regional, collaborative effort. We will work with key members of Congress, leaders of regional organizations, tribes, NGOs, and heads of federal agencies, as well as representatives of the Canadian government.

This regional collaboration of national significance will lead to results-oriented strategies for making meaningful progress. The President has asked for a formal report by May 31, 2005.

The Executive Order issued by President Bush, along with the follow-on activities, provide clear evidence of the President's commitment to the Great Lakes. The Executive Order also reflects our commitment to the U.S.-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA, or the Agreement), as well as to the role and responsibilities set forth for the Great Lakes National Program Office under Section 118 of the Clean Water Act. The Act requires EPA, and more specifically the Great Lakes National Program Office, to serve as the lead entity for coordinating the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes system with the appropriate federal and provincial agencies in Canada, and also to take a leadership role in coordinating Great Lakes issues nationally with other Federal Agencies, the eight Great Lakes States, and Tribal authorities

The April 2003 GAO Report recommended that the Administrator of EPA ensure GLNPO fulfills its responsibilities for coordinating programs within the Great Lakes basin, and consults with the Governors of each Great Lakes State, as well as with other federal agencies, and other organizations. The GAO also recommended EPA take the lead to develop an overarching strategy that clearly defines roles and responsibilities for coordinating and prioritizing funding for projects.

These recommendations are answered by the Executive Order. It is our intent to incorporate the Executive Order into our response to the GAO report. We expect to finalize our response shortly, and will transmit it to GAO as soon as possible.

Before closing today, I also would like to note President Bush's and EPA's commitment to two programs critical to the success of Great Lakes restoration efforts. A major factor in cleaning up the Great Lakes Areas of Concern is the implementation of the Great Lakes Legacy Act of 2002. I am pleased to report that the Agency has received 14 applications for project funding in response to EPA's March 31 deadline for project proposals for the FY04 Legacy Act appropriation of \$10 million. We are in the process of reviewing these applications and expect to initiate at least one project this fiscal year. President Bush has requested an additional \$45 million in funding for the Legacy Act in his proposed FY 05 budget, and the interest in Legacy Act projects positions us well to continue cleaning up sites at an increased pace if the President's requested amount is appropriated.

The second program is that of Lakewide Management Plans. LaMPs have been updated every two years, beginning in 2000. Challenges facing each Lake are identified, and these range from continuing to reduce toxic inputs to the lakes, the threat of invasive species, habitat protection and restoration, as well as documenting problems that remain. These are blueprints to manage our efforts to improve the conditions of each of the Lakes, which need specifically tailored actions directed at solving each Lake's most significant environmental problems.

Each LaMP is reflective of current knowledge and the ecosystem status of each lake, using adaptive management approaches and principles. Environmental problems outlined in the LaMPs require multi-year, multi-Agency solutions. Each LaMP includes progress which has taken place over the past 2 years in achieving the goals and objectives outlined in the preceding LaMP.

In President Bush's FY05 budget, an additional \$3 million for Lakewide Management Plans and Remedial Action Plans is proposed, which would bring the total up to \$5.7 million for these programs. This will help initiate projects to restore beneficial uses at the Areas of Concern and will support State and local governments in their development and implementation of these Great Lakes restoration plans.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee again for providing the opportunity to report on the considerable progress we are making. Real momentum has been generated to ensure the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes, which is critical for the economic and environmental health of this great nation.

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