



Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

Annual Report

2014-2015



From the Chair

Dear Mayors and Friends of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River,

It has been an honor to chair the organization this past year. My work with you, particularly with the urgent issues that have arisen around nutrient pollution in the lakes and oil transportation throughout the region, has reinforced the need for a group like ours - committed local leaders working to advance the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. I am pleased with the work we have underway to encourage various stakeholders – municipalities, agriculture, industry and others – to come to the table to find more immediate, on the ground solutions to reducing the amount of nutrients that find their way into our waterways and threaten our drinking water. The voice of the mayors is critical when it comes to the safety of our communities and our citizens as we witness more and more derailments of trains carrying crude oil throughout the region. I encourage all our members to continue their good work within their communities, to engage elected officials to be the change we want to see, and to continue to give a voice and strength to our coalition. In so doing, we will help safeguard the health and vitality of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River and ensure the economic well being and quality of life of the millions of people who call this region home, now and in the future.

Sincerely,

John Dickert
Mayor of Racine, Wisconsin
Chair and Director, 2014—2015



Voice of Mayors

Nutrient Action Collaborative

In August 2014, Toledo, OH residents were advised not to drink the water for two days for fear of contamination by microcystin, a toxin found in a harmful algal bloom (HAB) that developed in the western basin of Lake Erie. The late Mayor D. Michael Collins of Toledo was faced with a great deal of uncertainty around the HAB, the potential for contamination from the toxin microcystin, and testing procedures and protocols. In the wake of this drinking water crisis, Mayor Rahm Emanuel of Chicago and the Cities Initiative called together the [Mayors' Drinking Water Summit](#) in September 2014. Mayor Collins spoke of the Toledo experience, and we heard from a number of other experts on the issue of HABs.



Lake Erie Algae Bloom

The goal of this summit was for mayors to explore the issue of nutrient loadings in the lakes and identify some actions that can be taken in the near term by all sectors to reduce nutrients running off into the lakes. We continue this work now with efforts to develop Nutrient Action Collaboratives around the region to encourage collaboration among municipalities, agriculture, industry and other stakeholders. The goal of these collaboratives is to get all sectors taking action to identify best practices to reduce nutrient discharges, share information on those best practices, and measure progress on those best practices over time.

Oil Transportation in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region

Despite the introduction of new safety measures following the Lac-Mégantic tragedy on July 6, 2013, causing the deaths of 47 people, destruction of half of the downtown area and the release of 1.3 million gallons of oil, there were five serious derailments in the first ten weeks of 2015. Transportation of oil by rail from Alberta and North Dakota has increased 40 fold in the past five years, now at over 500,000 cars annually, and is expected to double in the coming years. According to the U.S. Federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, crude oil originating from the Bakken oilfield is more volatile and dangerous than other types of crude, making explosions more likely if a tank car derailed and punctures. Given that much of the transit of oil in the region occurs in and around municipalities and near the lakes and river,



Oil Transport by Rail, credit: Daniel Acker/Bloomberg

this has been a priority issue for a number of our members for some time (see our 2014 [Resolution](#)). In light of the recent high number of derailment accidents, the Cities Initiative is closely monitoring the new rules that have been introduced by Canadian and US authorities to address the significant risk posed by the rail transportation of oil. Even though the May 1, 2015 new rules and ongoing legislation have addressed most of our concerns, some outstanding issues must be resolved to ensure that municipalities, their citizens and our freshwater resources are secured against threats from derailments, accidents and spills. We will continue monitor this issue closely and to further establish the organization's position and determine its actions to reduce the risks from these threats.

Voice of Mayors

Asian Carp

The Cities Initiative actively participates in the Advisory Committee working to come up with short and long term measures to reduce the risk of Asian carp reaching Lake Michigan and the rest of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Basin through the Chicago Area Waterway System. The 35 member Advisory Committee, with representatives of a cross section of stakeholders, is working under the leadership of two excellent facilitators funded by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The goal is to reach a regional consensus on a long term solution by December 2015. The Advisory Committee has reached consensus on short term risk reduction actions, including a number of enhancements at the Brandon Road lock about 50 miles south of Chicago. The Corps of Engineers has the approval to move forward with design work, but still needs funding approval from Congress to proceed. Discussions on the long term solution proceed, but are much more difficult as transportation interests argue against any solution that would include physical barriers. Much work needs to be done before consensus is reached by the December 2015 deadline.



Asian Carp

Partnership with Jordan River Mayors

The Cities Initiative was approached by a group called Eco Peace Middle East in November 2014 to consider a partnership with Jordan River mayors. Eco Peace Middle East is a non-government organization that works with a number of groups on the Jordan River to improve the sustainability of the River and bring the people of the area closer together. Mayors John Dickert of Racine, Mitch Twolan of Huron-Kinloss and Denis Lapointe of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield participated as speakers at the Water after Borders Summit with Jordan River mayors on April 24, 2015. Additionally, the mayors representing the Cities Initiative and the mayors representing the Jordan Valley signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) to create a “Sister Waters” Partnership between the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative and EcoPeace Middle East (Good Water Program Mayors/Municipalities). The MOU encourages the exchange of technological, business, educational, capacity-building and community learning through sister city and sister water relationships. We look forward to the information-sharing and learning between mayors and cities through this unique partnership.



Cities Initiative and Jordan River Mayors

Representing Cities

Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement

Our work on the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement continues to focus on accelerating implementation of the agreement through our participation on the Great Lakes Executive Committee (GLEC) and three annex subcommittees: Annex 2 – Lake-wide Management Plans; Annex 4 – Nutrients; and Annex 6 – Invasive Species. The bulk of the work of GLEC right now focuses on the issue of nutrient reductions in the lakes as well as helping to bring closure to the work on indicators for assessing the health and state of the Great Lakes. Our work also continues with the annex subcommittees, with perhaps the most active subcommittee being Annex 4 – Nutrients, which is covered by Nicola Crawhall. David Ullrich and Simon Belisle continue their representation of the municipal voice on Annex 2 and Annex 6 subcommittees.

Work on developing a clear set of indicators to assess the health and state of the Great Lakes continues. The International Joint Commission's (IJC) Great Lakes Water Quality Board, of which David Ullrich is the co-chair, is bringing this work to closure by the end of the year. The indicators will be a key part of the U.S. and Canadian reports of progress under the Water Quality Agreement in 2016 and the IJC's assessment of those reports in early 2017.

Washington Great Lakes Days

Mayor John Dickert of Racine, Cities Initiative Chair, was in Washington February 24-26, 2015 for this year's Great Lakes Days. Great Lakes Days is an opportunity for stakeholders from the region to meet with congressional representatives and agencies to represent the priorities and needs of the Great Lakes. Mayor Dickert, David Ullrich, and Simon Belisle had a very full schedule, including events like the Mayor's presentation to the Great Lakes Commission on our nutrients work, a briefing on Asian carp, meeting with Canadian Ambassador to the US Gary Doer, meeting with the US Army Corps of Engineers Brigadier General Richard Kaiser, and meetings with Congressmen, Senators, and their staff. The key topics were Asian carp, funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, nutrients, radioactive waste, and others. The Washington Great Lakes Days continue to be an important opportunity for the Cities Initiative to promote the voice of mayors on Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River issues.



Rep. Ron Kind and Chair John Dickert

Great Lakes Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC)

A renewed memorandum of cooperation (MOC) on the Great Lakes between the Ontario Government and the Cities Initiative is expected to be completed in June 2015. The renewed MOC will allow the Ontario Government to consult with the Cities Initiative on a confidential basis early in the development of policies affecting the Great Lakes. The MOC will provide for collaboration on issues related to the implementation of the Canada-Ontario Agreement on the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem, such as nutrients entering the Great Lakes, and climate change impacts on the Lakes.

Great Lakes Fishery Commission

The Cities Initiative is represented on the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) by David Ullrich, who serves as vice chair. The central work is keeping sea lamprey populations under control, and all indications are that the program is successful. Lake trout populations are increasing and other fish species are stable or increasing. The GLFC also coordinates the fish management work of the states and provinces. Maintaining a healthy fishery is critical to the economic vitality of the entire region and the communities in the area.

Great Lakes Advisory Board

The Cities Initiative continues its work with the Great Lakes Advisory Board (GLAB) to help shape the future of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The GLAB developed and submitted comments on the proposed GLRI Action Plan, back in early 2014. Now, the GLAB is providing advice to the Great Lakes Interagency Taskforce, the multiagency group that helps sets the priorities for GLRI funding, on adaptive management and information systems, nutrient reductions in the lakes, and evaluating the effectiveness of GLRI projects.

2014 Annual Member Meeting & Conference

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative thanks Mayor Keith Hobbs, the planning committee, and the City of Thunder Bay for a wonderful annual meeting and conference in June 2014. With more than 150 attendees and three action-packed days, the annual meeting, entitled *Navigating Change: Fresh Air, Fresh Water, Fresh Ideas*, provided mayors, staff and other stakeholders insight on issues of significance to municipalities, such as adaptation to climate change, nutrient loadings in the lakes, and the threat of microplastics. The membership carried eight resolutions on topics ranging from Asian carp and microplastics to ensuring the safe transport of fossil energy products throughout the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence region. Congratulations to the City of Highland Park on winning the Wege Award, the City of Kingston for winning the *Most Innovative Water Conservation Award*, the City of Grand Rapids for winning the *Most Progress on Water Conservation Award*, and the City of Montreal for winning the Green CiTTS award for their public reporting on sustainable municipal water management.



Cities Initiative Board and Executive Director David Ullrich

2014 Midyear Board Meeting

The Cities Initiative Board of Directors convened a successful Midyear Meeting in Racine, Wisconsin, December 4-5, 2014. Chair and Mayor of Racine John Dickert hosted the meeting, and Mayors Lapointe, Barrett, Hope, Dyster, Heartwell, Cooper, Twolan, and Deputy Mayor Morin-Doyle participated, along with a number of city staff. One of the most pressing issues addressed at the meeting was the formation of a strategic alliance to accelerate action on the issue of nutrients. Although many stakeholders are currently working on this issue, the Cities Initiative is pursuing a strategic alliance to expedite the actions in light of imminent threats to water quality. The board also addressed continued work on the Asian Carp and the next phase of the Water Conservation Framework. Finally, the board approved Niagara Falls, NY as the 2016 Annual Meeting host after an enthusiastic presentation by Mayor Dyster.



Cities Initiative Board in Racine, WI

African Great Lakes Trip

Over 50 people from the U.S., Canada, and multiple African countries gathered in Kigoma, Tanzania on the shores of Lake Tanganyika for a three day conference February 2-4, 2015, to share knowledge and best practices on large lake management, protection, and restoration. This is part of a new initiative, entitled Great Lakes to Great Lakes (GL2GL) by the US State Department. David Ullrich, in his capacity as Vice Chair of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and representing the Cities Initiative perspective as well, attended and gained much information about the invasive species, nutrient runoff, land use planning, fisheries management, drinking water supply, and wastewater control issues in the African Great Lakes. Local governments in the area face huge challenges in building and maintaining waste water and drinking water infrastructure to serve their people.



GL2GL Group

Initiatives

Municipal Adaptation and Resilience Service

The Municipal Adaptation and Resilience Service (MARS), launched in January 2014, helps municipalities better adapt and build resilience in the face of climate change and extreme weather in the region. Through an 18-month collaboration with the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and the Environment and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Cities Initiative worked with a team of graduate students who prepared a Climate Ready Cities toolkit for our members. A series of seven webinars was held over the course of last fall and winter, featuring presentations prepared by the SNRC graduate students and external experts in climate adaptation. The Climate Ready team also prepared five case studies of municipal adaptation, in association with member cities Evanston, Goderich, Traverse City, Milwaukee, and Niagara Region. Infographics and a GIS application on cold weather impacts were also prepared. Visit the MARS section at www.glslcities.org for all the resources mentioned herein. The Cities Initiative thanks Heather Stirratt, Great Lakes Regional Coordinator of NOAA's National Ocean Service, and Professor David Allan of SNRE and his team of graduate students, Pearl Zhu Zheng, Wufan Jia, Alexandra Brewer, Andrea Kraus, Lauren White and Sam Molnar for this productive collaboration.



Infographic by University of Michigan Graduate Students

Sustainable Municipal Water Management

At the Cities Initiative 2014 Annual Meeting, four communities presented their Sustainable Municipal Water Management (SMWM) Public Reports: Milwaukee, Montreal, Durham Region, and St. Catharines. The Municipal Public Report is a means for municipalities to track their progress and report publically on their efforts to manage water more sustainably.

The scorecard and public report are likely the first of their kind in North America. Over the last year, additional cities have conducted the internal review and completed the scorecard and report, including the Town of Goderich, Ontario and the City of Evanston, IL. Their information, along with the others, can be found in the Sustainable Municipal Water section at www.glslcities.org.



The Evanston Tap Water Station is set up at community events to promote tap water and educate residents on water conservation practices.

Credit—City of Evanston

Initiatives

Water Conservation Framework

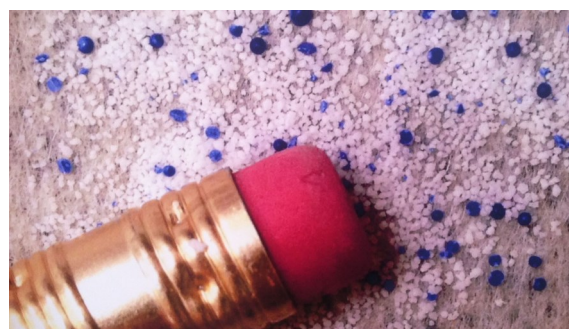
2015 marks the eighth year of the Water Conservation Framework and the end of the target phase of the program. The next phase will focus more on best practices sharing and recognizing water conservation work being done by member cities. The Cities Initiative Water Conservation Framework was a big success. 33 cities participated in the program – approximately 18 of which had water conservation efforts underway and 15 of which further developed their water conservation efforts. Over the last eight years we have recognized 11 cities for innovation and progress on water conservation. Most importantly, however, through the hard work and foresight of these communities, 123 billion gallons of water (465 billion liters) were conserved. Member cities lead by example on water conservation and the next phase of the program will focus on developing more water conservation best practices from communities around the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River region.



Participant City Kingston, ON—credit Svetlana Rytkhova

Microplastics

Cities Initiative members have continued their work to curb microplastic pollution of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River over the last year. The Town of the Blue Mountains, ON passed a resolution banning the use of microbeads-laced products in its municipal activities, setting an example for its residents. Traverse City, MI endorsed a resolution encouraging its residents to make the right choices regarding microbeads products. At the State level, three Great Lakes states adopted legislation banning the use and sale of microbeads products, Illinois, Indiana and New York. Other states and the province of Ontario are exploring similar bills in their general assemblies. The Cities Initiative will monitor legislative activities and support initiatives leading to the elimination of microbeads in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence in the coming year.



Microbeads— credit: Olga Lyandres

New Cities Initiative Website

This year, in addition to its regular programs and initiatives, the Cities Initiative began construction of a new website. The new site will improve information sharing with and among member cities. The new and improved site will be launched at the Annual Meeting, and will highlight the “Best Practices Library” that will be available in the fall. This new database will allow member cities to search a catalogue of member-submitted Best Practices by project type, location, and language. Find it under the “Resources” section on the new www.glslcities.org site— the library will be complete in Fall 2015.



Québec City, QC

Membership

The Cities Initiative gains its strength and voice from its members. In our twelve years of existence, we are pleased to have grown to a coalition of 114 members, with representation across the entire Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin, in the US and Canada, all eight Great Lakes States and Ontario and Quebec. The different perspectives of the members and their understanding of the vital freshwater system that connects them, gives the Cities Initiative its credibility, strength, and strong voice.

The work of elected officials is difficult, requires making unpopular decisions, and must be done with limited time and resources. The time and dedication member mayors devote to the organization is deeply appreciated. Several former mayors were instrumental in the organization in its early years and involved often during their tenure in elected office and deserve special recognition: Brain McMullan of St. Catharines, Deb Shewfelt of Goderich, and Ed-die Francis of Windsor. These mayors helped make organization the success it is today.

The Organization



Recognition

The Cities Initiative was deeply honored to receive The Governor General of Canada's Medallion for strengthening relations between Canada and the United States. His Excellency David Johnston presented the award in April of 2015 in Chicago and stated, "The Cities Initiative is a shining example of stewardship and partnership."

Cities Initiative Staff

It was bittersweet to bid farewell this past year to Philippe Chenard and Robert Masson, the Québec staff, as they left the Cities Initiative to pursue other endeavors. Philippe has become Head of Research at Fondation CSN and Robert is working full-time with the Québec Metropolitan Community. Philippe and Robert were instrumental in increasing the Cities Initiative profile in Quebec and with Quebec agencies, as well as increasing our Québec membership from 11 members to 27 members.

Two new staff members to the Cities Initiative joined the organization over the last year: Laura Bretheim and Scott McKay. Laura is the new Program and Administrative Assistant, based in Chicago. She brings much needed support to the Chicago staff on critical tasks like membership management, program and communications assistance, and website development. Scott is the new Québec Program and Policy Manager, based in Montréal. He comes to the Cities Initiative with a deep knowledge of water issues affecting the St. Lawrence River as well as a great understanding of municipal and provincial government. Scott and Laura are wonderful additions to the Cities Initiative team. They can be reached at scott.mckay@glslcities.org and laura.bretheim@glslcities.org.

About Us

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a coalition of U.S. and Canadian mayors and other local officials working together to advance the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. By integrating their environmental, economic and social agendas, local governments help sustain a resource that represents 20 percent of the world's surface freshwater, provides drinking water for 40 million people, and is the foundation upon which a strong regional economy and high quality of life is based.

Sincere Thanks

The Cities Initiative is grateful to its member mayors and their communities as well as the foundations that have generously supported the organization, including the Joyce Foundation, the Mott Foundation, and the Wege Foundation.

Cover Images are: Superior, WI; Beauharnois, QC; St. Catharines, ON; Gaspé, QC; Ashland, WI