



BACKGROUND

Ontario and Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative Areas of Cooperation

June 1, 2010

Protecting our beaches and coastal areas

Ontario has more than 200 Great Lakes beaches and thousands of kilometres of coastline that make up the longest freshwater coast in the world.

Ontario's Great Lakes Basin communities benefit from healthy, well-managed beaches and coastal areas. Ontario and the Cities Initiative hosted a beaches and coastal areas workshop in April 2010 to discuss coastal health and management, biodiversity conservation, and tourism.

The workshop brought representatives from federal, provincial and municipal governments, non-government organizations, and interest groups together to collaborate on how to make progress on improving the management of Ontario's Great Lakes beaches and coasts.

Ontario and the Cities Initiative will work together with other groups to create a new provincial-municipal beaches and coastal areas network to share information and best management practices, and discuss future areas of cooperation. To start, the Cities Initiative will collect and share success stories on their website, create a list serve to connect interested groups, explore webinars for training and ways to increase promotion.

Forecasting beach postings

The beaches along the Great Lakes shores are important for recreation and contribute to healthy active lifestyles. Having swimmable water is a common public indicator of the health of the Great Lakes.

Ontario beaches can be affected by a number of sources of pollution including runoff from roads, communities, farms, rivers, wastewater treatment plants, septic systems, gulls, geese, pets and wildlife. If bacterial levels exceed a certain level, beaches are posted by local public health units and others.

The Ministry of the Environment and the City of Toronto are working together to develop a new, improved method of forecasting when beach postings are necessary. The City

will test the new method on Toronto beaches through the summer of 2010. A final report will provide recommendations about how these models can be used throughout the province.

Updating wastewater infrastructure

Many communities are upgrading sewage treatment plants and sewer systems, optimizing plants and implementing pollution prevention plans to reduce bypasses. Ontario Great Lakes municipalities invest more than \$900 million annually in wastewater infrastructure. Ontario has committed an additional \$653 million since 2007. This includes funding to upgrade the last of Ontario's primary sewage treatment plants. These upgrades will improve overall treatment and reduce municipal wastewater pollution in the Great Lakes.

Updating sewage bypass requirements

Despite the significant progress being made to update aging infrastructure, heavy rains and spring thaw runoff often overwhelm sewer systems in some Ontario communities. As a result, these pipes and sewage treatment plants discharge large amounts of stormwater along with untreated or partially treated sewage into waterways.

The Ministry of the Environment and a number of volunteer municipalities are working together on a pilot project to develop and test a new method for electronic tracking and reporting of sewage bypasses.

The project will also allow the ministry to consult on proposed new requirements for municipalities to implement long-term plans for minimizing untreated discharges.

Moving towards sustainable municipal infrastructure for sewage and stormwater

As Ontario's population grows, municipalities can expect an increased demand on sewage systems. Added to that pressure is the possibility of heavier rainfalls due to climate change. These two pressures combined may result in more polluted water runoff entering the Great Lakes.

Ontario and the Cities Initiative will work together to investigate and pilot new ways of managing stormwater runoff. The work will assist municipalities to work towards an integrated approach to stormwater and wastewater for planning in a way that will anticipate the impact of climate change and other pressures expected to increase runoff into the lakes.

Important goals are to reduce the amount of stormwater entering the sewage system while reducing stormwater run-off to the lakes. It's also important to rethink stormwater as an alternative source of water for reuse by municipalities and others. The results have the potential to protect the lakes while saving money for municipalities.

Valuing the Lakes - economic assessment

Mayors and ministers all agree that the Great Lakes contribute billions of dollars to Ontario's economy, including the value of goods and services we often take for granted such as clean drinking water, assimilation of wastes and recreational opportunities.

There are also significant costs associated with preventing and dealing with pollution of the lakes. If we invest in Great Lakes protection and restoration, we know that the short and long term economic benefits easily outweigh the costs.

Ontario and the Cities Initiative are working with other partners on an assessment of the economic value of protecting and restoring the Great Lakes. The study is being guided by a steering committee with representatives from the Cities Initiative and three provincial ministries as well as a multi-stakeholder advisory group. It is expected to be completed by fall 2010.

Ministry of the Environment

ontario.ca/environment-news

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