



## **Backgrounder**

For Release: May 5, 2009

### **ONTARIO MAYORS' FIVE POINT COLLABORATIVE ACTION PLAN TO PROTECT THE GREAT LAKES**

#### ***What is the Mayors' Five Point Collaborative Action Plan?***

On May 5, 2009, Ontario Great Lakes Mayors will present and discuss their report, "*At the Shoreline: A Mayors' Collaborative Action Plan to Protect the Great Lakes*", at a Joint Summit Meeting with Ontario Minister of the Environment John Gerretsen, Natural Resources Minister Donna Cansfield, and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Minister Leona Dombrowsky.

The report proposes five strategic actions which recognise the vital role municipalities play in protecting the Great Lakes and call for collaboration with all governments:

1. Create a tripartite table to coordinate federal, provincial and municipal actions and investments to protect the Great Lakes
2. Improve and promote beaches and natural areas
3. Attack nuisance and toxic algae
4. Reduce stormwater and sewage entering the lakes
5. Prepare a strong business case for Great Lakes investment

#### ***Why do we need a tripartite table?***

There is currently no forum where political representatives from all three governments meet to coordinate and collaborate on Great Lakes protection. Cities, towns and regions are collectively the largest financial contributor to Great Lakes protection. In Ontario alone, municipalities spend over \$2 billion each year on Great Lakes protection activities.

#### ***Why do we need to improve and promote beaches?***

Beaches are one of the main ways that people connect and enjoy the lakes. We need to reorient some of our Great Lakes programs to better focus on beaches. Beach conditions vary widely by lake, with some beaches open around 20% of the swimming season while others are open approximately 90% of the time. In some areas where we have focussed on beaches, we have seen substantial improvements in beach openings. The '80% opening' target is an internationally recognized standard established by the Blue Flag international beaches accreditation program.

#### ***Why do we need to attack algae?***

Explosive algal growth is a serious problem for parts of Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Georgian Bay, causing unpleasant sights and smells, affecting drinking water, and resulting in millions of dollars in costs to industrial and municipal intake pipes.

***Why do we need to reduce stormwater and sewage entering the lakes?***

Untreated sewage and stormwater are a major source of pollution. It is anticipated that increased precipitation due to climate change will only exacerbate the problem. While treatment and retention infrastructure will always be needed, reducing the amount of sewage and stormwater ‘at source’ by applying green infrastructure and water conservation strategies represent a cost effective way of reducing stormwater and sewage releases and adapting to climate change.

***Why do we need an economic study?***

Great Lakes Mayors are also calling for a joint economic study to develop a strong business case for investment. This will help municipal councils, federal and provincial decision makers and other groups to inform and help justify Great Lakes investment decisions. A recent study by the Brookings Institution suggests that investment in Great Lakes protection and restoration can have a 2:1 rate of return on investment. Progress will continue to be slow without collaboration with local government.

***What is the Canada-Ontario Agreement Memorandum of Cooperation (COA MOC)?***

The Mayors’ Collaborative Action Plan was prepared as a result of a new collaborative process between Ontario municipalities and the provincial government established in July 2008 under the Great Lakes Canada-Ontario Agreement Memorandum of Cooperation (COA MOC). Facilitated by the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, the COA MOC process involved municipal-provincial dialogue on Great Lakes issues of mutual interest, and created a forum for Mayors to give strategic advice to the Province for the upcoming negotiations of the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem (COA).

The COA is the primary agreement between Canada and Ontario to protect Great Lakes water quality on the Canadian side of the lakes. The COA defines goals, responsibilities and actions related to maintaining and enhancing water quality. It is also the mechanism used by Canada to meet obligations under the Canada-US Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, which defines bi-national goals and results.

***Why do Ontario Mayors care about the Great Lakes?***

- The Great Lakes are a globally significant resource. The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin is estimated to contain 20 percent of the world’s fresh surface water resources, and 95 percent of North America’s fresh surface water supply.
- Many Ontario communities rely on the lakes for economic growth. Home to over 40 million people basin-wide in Canada and the US, if the Great Lakes region was a country, it would have the second largest economy in the world. In Canada, the region supports 25% of the country’s agriculture and 45% of its industrial output.
- The Great Lakes basin is one of the most ecologically diverse regions in North America. With over 3,500 species in the Basin, the ecological services provided by the region are invaluable, particularly on the shoreline and within the nearshore zone.
- Ontarians love the lakes. Ontario alone has 5,300 kilometers of shoreline on four of the five Great Lakes. The shoreline is where people experience and enjoy the lakes, whether fishing and angling, hiking, birdwatching, or swimming at the beach.

- Municipalities have direct responsibilities linked to Great Lakes water quality. They provide drinking water, manage sewage and stormwater outflows, develop pollution control plans, operate local beaches and marinas, oversee waterfront development, protect wetlands and natural areas, build and maintain transportation systems, and engage the public in conservation and environmental programs. Over 9 million Ontarians rely on the Great Lakes for their drinking water.

***What is the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative?***

Established in 2003, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a bi-national coalition of over 60 mayors and other local officials that works actively with federal, state, tribal, First Nation and provincial governments and other stakeholders to advance the protection, restoration and promotion of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin.

[www.glskcities.org](http://www.glskcities.org)

***For more information:***

A copy of the report, “*At the Shoreline: A Mayors’ Collaborative Action Plan to Protect the Great Lakes*” can be found at [www.glskcities.org/](http://www.glskcities.org/).

Nicola Crawhall, Deputy Director  
Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative  
Tel: 416-463-4938  
E-mail: [nicola.crawhall@sympatico.ca](mailto:nicola.crawhall@sympatico.ca)

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### ***Summary of Recommendations:***

The Great Lakes Mayors' report outlines the components of their five point collaborative action plan and makes the following recommendations:

#### **Action 1: Create a municipal-provincial-federal Great Lakes Table**

1.1: Create a senior municipal-provincial-federal Great Lakes Table, with Mayors and Ministers meeting at least once a year, to report on progress, discuss ideas and move forward collaboratively on Great Lakes protection.

#### **Action 2: Improve and Promote Beaches, Natural Areas, Waterfronts, Trails and Tourism**

2.1: Develop a joint beaches strategy, with a target date of 2015 to have Ontario beaches open a minimum of 80% of the swimming season.

2.1.1: The joint beaches strategy would include, but not be limited to:

- Measures to improve beach management, assessments, and exchange of best practices, with funding support
- Improved beach monitoring and monitoring methods, including predictive modelling and real time beach quality indicators; increased monitoring frequency; increasing the number of Great Lakes beaches monitored and revised monitoring and posting criteria, with funding support
- Measures to increase people's use and appreciation of beaches, e.g. through a beach certification program such as the Blue Flag program; and better public information on beach quality
- Research on improving our understanding of rates of illness associated with beach use.

2.1.2: Create a Beach Office within the provincial government to lead development of the beaches strategy, in conjunction with a new Beaches Panel of provincial, federal and municipal governments and other interested groups.

2.2: Work with the provincial government to increase the support and funding for natural areas, waterfronts, trails and tourism along the Great Lakes, including the implementation of biodiversity and natural heritage plans and promotion of volunteer activity for local shoreline clean-up activities.

2.3: Work with municipal, provincial, federal governments and others to develop methods to foster people's awareness, connection and enjoyment of the Great Lakes, including a marketing and tourism program geared to identifying the Great Lakes as a national treasure.

### **Action 3: Attack Nuisance and Toxic Algae**

3.1: Work with municipal, provincial, federal government and other parties to undertake a comprehensive algae control plan to reduce phosphorus concentrations in the nearshore and tributaries to a level that prevents nuisance growth of alga.

3.1.1: The algal control plan would:

- Identify areas seriously affected by algae.
- Where necessary, undertake research to establish the sources, amounts and loadings of nutrients to the watershed and nearshore in these areas.
- Develop lakewide and local nutrient control plans.
- Based on conclusions, implement control measures which give the greatest nearshore improvements.

3.1.2: Encourage the provincial government and others to increase research into algae growth and control measures, including:

- Increasing the translation of current science into practical control measures.
- Sharing and application of lessons learnt from existing research partnerships to other areas of the Lakes.
- Supporting the development and implementation of innovative non-point source control measures.
- Supporting and participating in new provincial and federal research to develop further Predictive Frameworks for Management of Cladophora Biomass and blue green toxic algae.

### **Action 4: Reduce Untreated Sewage and Stormwater Discharges Entering the Great Lakes, in Light of Climate Change and Technical Innovations**

4.1: Call on the federal and provincial governments to assist and encourage municipalities, through policy guidance and technical and financial support, to develop and update their pollution control and prevention plans or other planning methods to reduce sewage discharges.

4.1.1: Calling on the provincial and federal government to adopt aggressive water conservation measures including: a ban on the sale of water guzzling 13 litre toilets and other inefficient appliances, develop a standardized/"model" water efficiency plan, support the development and implementation of municipal water efficiency plans and a public campaign on water conservation, and other measures in cooperation with municipalities.

4.1.2: Municipalities working with federal and provincial governments on innovative funding options to accelerate projects to address combined sewer overflows.

4.1.3: Accelerating the current Ministry of Environment's wastewater review.

4.1.4: Encouraging the development and funding of new more innovative methods of treating sewage.

4.1.5: Reviewing the need for the provincial or federal government to enhance low interest loans and other mechanisms to owners to replace or upgrade leaking septic systems.

4.2: Call on the federal and provincial governments to assist and encourage municipalities, through policy guidance and financial support, to develop, update and implement their integrated stormwater master plans to adopt a new approach to stormwater management that prioritises reduction and reuse of stormwater over treatment and retention.

4.2.1: Increase provincial and federal support for research, analysis, implementation and post implementation monitoring on new and more innovative methods of stormwater control, which could result in new design standards, and the development of regulatory instruments to help advance the implementation of at source measures, including 10 projects that apply the new approach by 2011.

4.3: Call on the Federal Government and others to review and modify current infrastructure design criteria which no longer reflect the reality of precipitation rates due to climate change. To increase the pace of adaptation to climate change by:

- Municipalities work with federal and provincial governments to collaborate on new tools to design and adapt infrastructure to be climate ready.
- Municipalities work with federal and provincial governments to develop and implement local climate change plans, including improved identification and response to local impacts and translating global scale climate change models to local scale impacts.

#### **Action 5: Build a Business Case and Measure Results from Great Lakes Investments**

5.1: Municipalities work together with the provincial and federal government and others on economic studies of common Great Lakes shoreline activities, including economic modeling using local community input, both to develop the business case to drive investments in the Great Lakes and to measure the results of the investments made.

Together, during the COA MOC process, the Mayors identified these key areas of mutual interest on which to further collaborate and set goals for action. The Ontario municipal sector is interested in further defining the actions, projects, players and places to work cooperatively to carry out these recommendations.