

At the Shoreline: A Mayors' Collaborative Action Plan to Protect the Great Lakes



On May 5th, 2009, the Great Lakes Mayors and Chairs Committee presented their report, *At the Shoreline: A Mayors' Collaborative Action Plan to Protect the Great Lakes*, to the Ontario Ministers of Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs at the first Provincial-Municipal Great Lakes Summit in Toronto. The report consists of a five point action plan and key recommendations to forge a stronger relationship and strategic coordination among the three orders of government to protect and promote the Great Lakes.



'At the Shoreline' is the first Ontario Mayors' and Chairs' report on the Great Lakes, and so represents a historic milestone, recognising the vital role cities, regions and towns play in protecting the Great Lakes.

Great Lakes Mayors have a vested interest in the protection and promotion of the Great Lakes. Municipalities are responsible for providing people with drinking water; they own or operate beaches, waterfronts and natural areas; and they also manage stormwater and wastewater, that can have a direct impact on the Lakes. Mayors are also interested in maintaining the quality of the Great Lakes to promote local economic development and to enhance people's quality of life. Municipalities are collectively the largest financial contributors to the protection of Great Lakes. Local governments in Canada and the United States invest over \$15 billion every year to protect and restore the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River system. For all these reasons, Great Lakes Mayors recognize the importance of Great Lakes protection to the wellbeing of their communities.

This protection is particularly important at the shoreline, where municipalities meet the water. The shoreline is where most people interact with the lakes and where their experience of the lakes is formed. The nearshore also plays a vital role in preserving a healthy environment for fish and other aquatic species.



This Mayors' report grows from a new collaborative process between Ontario municipalities and the provincial Government established under the Great Lakes Canada Ontario Agreement Memorandum of Cooperation (COA MOC). The Agreement, signed last year between the Province of Ontario and the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, establishes a municipal-provincial dialogue on Great Lakes issues of mutual interest, and creates a forum for Mayors to give their strategic advice to the provincial government for the upcoming negotiations of the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem (COA).

With the anticipated renegotiation of COA in 2010, now is the time for the three orders of government to reach agreement on the most effective means to work together to protect the Great Lakes, including agreeing on priorities for action, strategic investments, sharing scientific and technical advice, and collaborating on research and programs.



The Mayors propose five areas of collaboration:

1. Create a municipal-provincial-federal Great Lakes table

The time has come for a new collaborative relationship among federal, provincial and municipal governments to reinvigorate and reorient Great Lakes protection for the benefit of the people who live and play at the shoreline. Currently, there is no senior forum where federal, provincial and municipal governments come together to coordinate their Great Lakes protection activities and plan for the future.

The Great Lakes Mayors are calling for a federal-provincial-municipal Great Lakes Table that would serve to coordinate efforts and share vital information. The Great Lakes MOC process has demonstrated the value of municipal and provincial dialogue to help inform provincial planning for its Great Lakes strategy and to develop collaborative work like this action plan.

2. Improve and promote beaches and natural shorelines

There may be no better way to strengthen the public's connection to the Great Lakes than to enhance and promote beaches and other shoreline activities such as wetlands, natural areas and trails. Drawing more people to the shoreline can also boost local economies and contribute to healthier lifestyles. With a greater share of Great Lakes shoreline than any other jurisdiction, it makes sense to promote Ontario as a major beach and shoreline destination.



While municipalities and local authorities play a large role in managing beaches and shoreline areas, we need to coordinate and collaborate with the provincial government to be successful in improving beaches and shoreline areas. The Mayors call for the development of a joint beaches strategy, with a target date of 2015 to have Ontario beaches open a minimum of 80% of the swimming season. This target can be achieved through provincial –municipal collaboration on improved beaches management, enhanced monitoring techniques, and the promotion of public information on the state of Ontario's beaches.

The Mayors would also like to work jointly with the provincial government to enhance, protect and promote other shoreline areas like trails and wetlands. This would also bring more people to the shoreline, foster people's connection, appreciation and enjoyment, increase healthy lifestyles and promote local tourism.

3. Attack nuisance and toxic algae

Parts of Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Georgian Bay are struggling with explosive growth of algae. Not only is it unsightly and smelly, it can also clog industrial and municipal intake pipes, resulting in millions of dollars in costs, and can contribute to depreciating shoreline property values. There has been considerable research on the causes of algal growth, but less clear policy direction and action to attack it. It is a complex problem that requires action at both the local and lake-wide level, requiring collaboration of all three orders of government and other partners.





The Mayors are calling for a comprehensive algae control plan to reduce nutrient concentrations and to address other contributing factors to prevent nuisance growth of algae. The control plan should be based on solid science, which identifies the most significant sources of nutrients contributing to algal growth. All governments need to work together and support new measures to reduce nutrient loadings and concentrations from these sources.

4. Reduce untreated sewage and stormwater discharges into the Great Lakes

The Mayors support a significant reduction of untreated or inadequately treated sewage and contaminated stormwater being released into the Lakes. To achieve this will require increased collaboration, investments and new creative approaches from all three orders of government. The challenge is all the more daunting in the face of increased precipitation due to climate change, and urban intensification. While increased investments in sewage treatment capacity will always be needed, there are also less capital intensive technical innovations that place the

emphasis on ‘moving up the pipe’, that is, reducing the flow of stormwater and sewage that enters the treatment system, bypasses or overflows from it after heavy rainfalls.

The Great Lakes Mayors are calling on the federal and provincial governments to work collaboratively with municipalities, by providing policy guidance, and technical and financial support, to adopt new approaches and innovations in their integrated stormwater management plans that prioritises reduction and reuse over treatment and retention. This could include source controls, aggressive water conservation measures, and green infrastructure, among other techniques. This new ‘moving up the pipe’ approach could also be incorporated into developing, updating and implementing pollution control and prevention plans and other methods to reduce untreated sewage discharges.

Support is also needed to assist the municipal sector to develop and implement climate change action plans, and to adapt their stormwater and wastewater infrastructure design to climate change and to test new techniques.

5. Build a Business Case and Measure Results of Great Lakes investments

At all three orders of government, there is a lack of solid information on the benefits of investments in projects and programs to improve the quality of the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Mayors would like to work together with the provincial and federal government and others on economic studies of the value of common Great Lakes shoreline activities, including economic modeling using community input in local areas of the Great Lakes, both to develop the business case to drive investments in the Great Lakes and to measure the results of investments made.

Great Lakes Mayors are committed to working in collaboration with their provincial and federal counterparts to ensure that people can enjoy the lakes and local communities can thrive at their shoreline. The Mayors are eager to begin this collaboration in the five areas identified in their Great Lakes Action Plan.



To view the full Mayors’ report, including specific recommendations, please view the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative website at www.gslcities.org/

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, provincial, tribal, and First Nation governments and other stakeholders to advance the protection, restoration and promotion of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin.

