



Cities and Province Affirm Commitment to Restoring and Protecting the Great Lakes

First-ever Great Lakes Summit held in Toronto

Embargoed until May 5, 2009, 2:30pm

May 5, 2009, Toronto – The Ontario Government and the mayors of municipalities around the Great Lakes have strengthened their commitment to coordinate efforts to restore, protect and promote the Great Lakes.

Ontario mayors and provincial cabinet ministers met today for the first time to discuss shared interests and concerns about the Great Lakes and their watersheds at a summit meeting organized by the province and the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative.

The Ontario mayors presented their recommendations and report, “At the Shoreline: A Mayors’ Collaborative Action Plan to protect the Great Lakes”, to the province today.

“We have received a lot of excellent advice which will help us decide on future programs and policies for the Great Lakes,” said Environment Minister John Gerretsen. “As the mayors have recommended, we agree it is critical to understand the economic benefits of investments in the Great Lakes. We are committed to working with the mayors on an economic study.”

Gerretsen also indicated that the economic study would involve other partners and stakeholders, including non governmental organizations, other municipalities, Aboriginal communities and business and industry around the Great Lakes. The federal government will also be invited to participate.

The provincial ministers agreed to work with the mayors on other areas of shared interest in their Great Lakes Action Plan, including enhancing and promoting beaches, wetlands and natural areas along the shorelines and considering the implications of climate change for stormwater and sewage discharges into the Great Lakes.

"Great Lakes municipalities are collectively the largest financial contributor to Great Lakes protection, with Ontario municipalities investing over \$2 billion a year. It is essential that the federal and provincial governments work with us to coordinate our efforts and investments," said Toronto Mayor David Miller. "As Great Lakes mayors we are calling on our federal and provincial partners to work with us to implement a joint protection plan for the Great Lakes. Together we can work to improve people's enjoyment of the Lakes and stimulate local economies in communities across Ontario."

The province and the Cities Initiative signed a Memorandum of Cooperation last year that paved the way for today's summit and to the municipalities providing input into implementation of the Canada Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem (COA). It has resulted in a series of meetings between provincial and municipal staff members to discuss areas of common concern, leading up to the summit.

As well, the Province is currently seeking input into its Great Lakes Priorities from a broad group of partners, stakeholders, non governmental organizations and Aboriginal communities.

"The Great Lakes mayors' recommendations complement the broader work that the province and our partners are doing to protect and restore Great Lakes ecosystem health," said Natural Resources Minister Donna Cansfield. "We look forward to working with the municipalities on shared areas of interest in the urban environment."

At the meeting, mayors and ministers also considered how to bring federal, provincial and municipal leaders together to protect the Great Lakes. The importance of Canada-US cooperation on Great Lakes protection was also discussed.

"Great Lakes Mayors recognize the importance of securing further support from our federal government in protecting these waters of national and global significance, said Thunder Bay Mayor Lynn Peterson, chair of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, "Engaging federal governments on both sides of the border to strengthen bi-national cooperation and to involve mayors and local communities is vitally important."

Mayors and ministers also recognized the importance of attracting more people to the Great Lakes' shorelines, to build support for Great Lakes investments and to promote local Great Lakes economies.

"Having clean water in the Great Lakes is vital to urban and rural communities," said Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Leona Dombrowsky. "As a shared resource, water is also a shared responsibility, which is why it is crucial for us to work together to protect it."

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