



September 18, 2007

The Honorable Barbara Boxer and The Honorable James M. Inhofe  
United States Senate, Committee on Environment and Public Works  
**Re: Funding Level for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund**

Dear Senator Boxer and Senator Inhofe:

The viability of one of the world's largest supplies of surface freshwater is in jeopardy. Thirty-five years after passage of the Clean Water Act, the Great Lakes, which provide drinking water to more than 35 million people, are still subject to degraded water quality from occurrences such as combined sewer overflow discharges and aging wastewater treatment plants. While municipalities and states invest a great deal of money to upgrade and address water and wastewater infrastructure, local units of government cannot be expected to fully cover these expenditures to meet the needs of the region. Although the federal government made major investments in this infrastructure in the past, the amount available to cities now has diminished dramatically. This must be changed.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a coalition of United States and Canadian mayors that work with federal, state, provincial, tribal and local officials to actively advance the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. The organization urges reauthorization of the Clean Water State Revolving Fund with increased and adequate funding; at the very least reestablishment of funding at the \$1.35 Billion level that has existed historically. The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative commends the United States House of Representatives for working to reverse proposed FY 2008 cuts in funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and the United States Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works for reaching out to stakeholders and considering revision to the current Senate authorized funding amount.

The Great Lakes are vital to the nation. Not only do they represent approximately 90 percent of the surface freshwater supply for the United States, provide a livelihood for the millions of people that live and recreate within the Basin, but the Great Lakes regional economy represents 30 percent of the United States' gross domestic product. The Lakes are also vital internationally, as exemplified through our relationship with Canada and the increasing significance of this major source of fresh water. The Great Lakes are truly a national and international resource that must be restored and protected.

Unfortunately, the lack of investment into this resource, particularly as a result of recent federal funding cuts to the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, threatens the Great Lakes, the quality of life of millions, and the nation's economy. The report released recently by

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the Brookings Institute documents how investment of \$26 billion in protection and restoration of the Great Lakes can lead to well over \$50 billion in economic benefits and activity in the region.

The Clean Water State Revolving Fund is a significant funding option in the Great Lakes region. Given the importance of the Great Lakes, as a source of drinking water, a recreational outlet, and the foundation for a strong and growing economy, addressing threats to this resource is a priority. The United States Environmental Protection Agency estimates that more than 150 U.S. municipalities or sewer districts with combined sewer systems operate on the Great Lakes or on tributaries to the Great Lakes, all of which are subject to overflows during significant storm events. Such overflows are associated with high bacteria counts at local beaches and in the water and possible public health risks.

Local units of government already invest a great deal to address water and wastewater infrastructure. As an example of the magnitude of municipal investment in combined sewer systems, per the *Report to Congress on the Impacts and Control of CSOs and SSOs 2004*, expenditures to correct combined sewer systems from 48 communities totaled \$6 Billion (Appendix M, pg. 5). This level of expenditure, combined with the age of water and wastewater infrastructure within the Great Lakes region and the value of the freshwater the Great Lakes provide, suggests that cutting funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund is ill-advised.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative encourages the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works to explore the current Senate authorized funding amount for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and consider revising that amount to an increased funding level. Furthermore, Congress is urged to do what it can to avoid further federal funding cuts to the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. The water and wastewater infrastructure of the Great Lakes region must be updated and maintained for the safety of the public, the livelihood of millions, and the economy that depends on this vital freshwater resource.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in advance of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works hearing regarding the Clean Water State Revolving Fund.

Sincerely,

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