



Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative Comments on the *Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Conservation and Efficiency Initiative*

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative (“GLSLCI”) is a bi-national coalition of mayors and other local officials actively working to protect and restore the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. GLSLCI focuses its work around three important areas for municipalities: water conservation, water quality and waterfront vitality. Cities and communities are uniquely positioned to have a positive impact on the Lakes and the St. Lawrence River and GLSLCI helps mayors and other local officials ensure this occurs.

GLSLCI was an active participant in the development of the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement and Compact and continues to commend the Governors and Premiers of the Great Lakes states and provinces, through the Council of the Great Lakes Governors, for their leadership on this vital endeavor.

As efforts to implement recommendations from the Agreement are underway, the commitment of Great Lake and St. Lawrence stakeholders to the Regional Collaboration becomes vital. The Governors and Premiers of the Great Lakes states and provinces have worked diligently to develop the regional water conservation and efficiency objectives called for in Article 304(1) of the Agreement. GLSLCI recognizes that, as with any collaborative effort, it is challenging to bring together a number of stakeholders and agree upon one course of action. The work of the Governors and Premiers around a collaborative water conservation and efficiency effort is recognized and appreciated.

While these objectives provide a good foundation for water conservation within the Basin, GLSLCI maintains, as it has throughout the Regional Collaboration process, that more rigorous conservation programs and measures must be implemented around the Basin. Though the objectives are intended to inform the development of individual state and provincial water conservation and efficiency goals and objectives, more focused and committed objectives at this stage will ensure successful programs around the Basin in the future.

The Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Conservation and Efficiency Initiative objectives would be improved with a greater focus on target reductions, milestones and timeframes, as well as encouragement around state and provincial governments introducing measures that will help municipalities reach their water conservation goals. Additionally, the objectives should place a greater emphasis on water conservation, given the importance of the resource, and may even be strengthened by

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explicitly making a link between water conservation and efforts to combat climate change. Finally, GLSLCI recognizes the inclusion of best practices sharing within the objectives as a vital element that will help bolster the effort.

Include Target Reductions, Milestones, and Timeframes

The Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Conservation and Efficiency Initiative objectives could be strengthened with more focused targets, milestones and timeframes. While the objectives provide a good framework for states and provinces to develop their own specific programs, the fact that the effort is voluntary and there are no benchmarks by which to gauge success and participation weakens the effort. Without concrete targets or timeframes it will be difficult to push for participation and prompt implementation.

Encourage State and Provincial Support of Municipalities

The objectives should also encourage state and provincial governments to work with municipalities to introduce measures that will directly help municipalities reach their water conservation goals. Examples of this could include a ban on low flow toilets or financial support for water loss reductions due to replacement of aging pipes. The region will be more successful in conserving water if various levels of government work together and support one another towards this endeavor.

Water Conservation vs. Efficiency

One percent of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River water is renewed each year while greater and greater quantities are used each year. For this reason, the Basin needs to focus on water conservation. Efficient use of the resource is important and can help to lessen the impact citizens and industries have on the resource. However, to make a tangible difference and to ensure the sustainability of the resource, we must start changing our practices and focusing on conservation. The draft objectives seem to place more emphasis on ‘efficient water use’ rather than water conservation. For instance, the objectives support providing incentives to encourage efficient water use; incentives should also be provided to encourage water conservation. GLSLCI recognizes that in order to make a true difference on the Lakes and the St. Lawrence, all stakeholders must develop new practices and approaches towards water. A focus on conservation is a necessity.

Increasingly, water conservation is discussed within the context of energy conservation and efficiency to combat climate change. The objectives provide an opportunity for states and provinces to demonstrate their awareness around the issue of climate change and their interest in working to combat it. Explicitly stating the link between water conservation and efforts to address climate change helps demonstrate the broad range of benefits that can be realized through achievement of the objectives.

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Best Practices Sharing

To the extent a water conservation practices and programs network or resource hub can be developed, the water conservation and efficiency goals of the Agreement will be better achieved. GLSLCI supports the development of a network for states and provinces to share best practices, technologies and programs to help achieve water conservation and efficiency. The draft objectives are on track regarding best practices sharing and could be enhanced with inclusion of a specific plan and timeframe for implementation of a best practices sharing network or mechanism.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River are the foundation upon which the region is built. Not only do they comprise the premier freshwater system in the world, providing U.S. and Canadian citizens with drinking water, but they support our need for recreation, industry, energy, and natural habitats. The region must band together to ensure these treasures are not squandered. Cities and communities are contributing by developing local water conservation programs and by participating in the GLSLCI Water Conservation Framework. Through the Framework, cities commit to reducing water use within their jurisdictions by 15% by the year 2015. The Framework is focused not only on conserving Great Lakes and St. Lawrence water, but also on best practices sharing so that more cities and communities are exposed to and adopt the best water conservation methods. The development of a target reduction and timeframe for the effort will help to ensure implementation and results from the Framework.

The Governors and Premiers of the Great Lakes states and provinces, through their work on the Regional Collaboration and their efforts to implement the recommendations of the Regional Collaboration are helping to protect and restore the treasures of our region. The draft Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Conservation Efficiency Initiative is a good first step towards water conservation within the region and could be improved by strengthening the objectives with targets and timeframes. GLSLCI is confident that the effort, along with water conservation programs at the local level, will lead to positive results within the region.