

INVESTING IN THE PROTECTION OF THE GREAT LAKES & ST. LAWRENCE ECOSYSTEM

The nexus of water, economy, and climate change

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River are a globally significant resource and ecosystem. Holding 20% of the world's surface freshwater, they provide drinking water to over 40 million Canadians and Americans. The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Region is also a critically important economic region, accounting for 30% of combined Canadian and U.S. economic activity and employment, with an economic output valued at US\$5.8 trillion in 2015.

Yet the region's ecological and economic significance is not sufficiently reflected in investments and programming to protect its waters and promote sustainable economic activity. Efforts to protect the lakes and river have not kept up with compounding stressors and new challenges, including climate change impacts, intensified growth, invasive species, new chemicals and contaminants, and ageing water infrastructure. The latest State of the Lakes report concluded that the condition of the lakes are either fair or poor and the trends are unchanging or deteriorating. The latest Overview of the State of the St. Lawrence River (2014) determined that the St. Lawrence is improving but remains vulnerable.

To improve the situation, a complementary, more integrated approach is proposed - an approach that builds on and reinforces existing priorities and programs. It would translate into new investments, strengthened programs, and the establishment of new coordinated actions to address identified gaps. The proposed process will allow for more integrated and better funded projects, aimed at addressing long standing problems and new threats to our water resources. This approach is based on the experience and advice of organizations and industries throughout the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence region.

Inspired by the US Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Collaborative Strategy (GLSLCS) will be an inclusive stakeholder-led process to arrive at a common vision and an action plan to amplify and accelerate collective actions and investments to protect and restore the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence waters and ecosystem. It would focus on the nexus of water, economy, and climate resiliency in the Great Lakes St Lawrence region, with special consideration to First Nations and Metis needs. The following proposal has been the subject of consultations with over 50 business organisations, ENGOs, municipalities, and conservation and fishery advocates.



A COLLABORATIVE STRATEGY FOR THE GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE RIVER



The GLSLCS proposes that an Independent Panel of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Stakeholders (IPS) be created to oversee the process, with representation from cities, industry and the environmental sector including NGOs from Quebec and Ontario.

As a first step, the Independent Panel of Stakeholders will consult with federal and provincial governments, First Nations and Métis and stakeholders to review and consolidate priorities. Agreements and plans to review include the St. Lawrence action Plan, the ZIP Program, the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting Great Lakes Ecosystem, Quebec’s Loi sur l’eau, which encompasses the Integrated Management of the St. Lawrence, the Quebec Maritime Strategy, and Ontario’s Great Lakes Strategy. The Panel will also consult on gaps in these agreements and plans that need addressing.



The Independent Panel of Stakeholders will then proceed to broader consultation on recommendations on the strategic investments, programs and projects needed to deliver on these priorities. A summit will be held to present the preliminary recommendations and seek input from a wide range of actors and interests.



It is estimated that this process will take one year to complete, beginning in the spring of 2018 and wrapping up by the spring of 2019, at a cost of \$600,000. The Collaborative partners request that the Federal Government finance this process. A special fund to support First Nations and Metis participation in the process is included in the funding request.

MORE INFORMATION

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