

February 5th, 2001

CANADA REINTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO PROTECT THE GREAT LAKES FROM BULK WATER REMOVALS

John Manley, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today reintroduced amendments to the International Boundary Waters Treaty Act (IBWTA). The amendments will prohibit the bulk removal of water from Canadian boundary waters, including the Great Lakes.

"These amendments will protect the Great Lakes from bulk water removal under federal law," said Minister Manley. "We are taking a decisive step to ensure that this critical freshwater resource is protected for future generations."

The prohibition on removals will apply principally to the Great Lakes and other boundary waters, such as the international sections of the St. Lawrence River and Lake of the Woods in Ontario and the St. Croix and Upper St. John rivers in New Brunswick. Separate from the prohibition, the amendments introduced today will also set in place a licensing regime for boundary waters projects such as dams, obstructions or other works.

Environment Minister David Anderson said, "Prohibiting the bulk removal of this vital natural resource protects the ecosystems and communities that depend upon a sustainable supply of water."

The reintroduction of the amendments to the IBWTA is the last step in a three-part strategy to prohibit bulk water removals from all Canadian water basins, announced in February 1999. Last year, the International Joint Commission (IJC), at the request of Canada and the United States, completed a study and released a report that concluded that the ecological integrity of the Great Lakes needs protection. The recommendations make it clear that removals and diversions of water from the Great Lakes basin represent a permanent loss of water, and must be managed differently from uses of water within the basin. The IBWTA amendments are consistent with the IJC's conclusions and recommendations. In addition, the Minister of the Environment has been working with the provinces and territories to ensure that all of Canada's freshwater resources are protected. All provinces have already put in place or are developing legislation or policies that accomplish this goal.

Canada's border with the United States is formed, crossed or straddled by more than 300 lakes and rivers. The International Boundary Waters Treaty Act was passed by Parliament in 1911. It implements the 1909 Canada-U.S. Boundary Waters Treaty, which establishes principles and procedures for preventing or settling disputes,

particularly regarding the quantity and quality of boundary waters between Canada and the United States.

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A backgrounder is attached.

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