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## **GREAT LAKES GOVERNMENTS ARE SQUANDERING OUR WATER BOUNTY CITIZENS LAUNCH CAMPAIGN FOR CONSERVATION**

Today Great Lakes residents in Lansing, Michigan; Madison, Wisconsin; Chicago, Illinois; Akron, Ohio; Buffalo, New York; Toronto, Ontario and Montreal, Quebec are releasing their report **"The Fate of the Great Lakes: Sustaining or Draining the Sweetwater Seas?"** This basin-wide release launches a citizens' campaign to save the waters of the Great Lakes.

"We have chosen to launch our action on February 10, 1997 because it is the twelfth anniversary of the signing of the Great Lakes Charter", said John Jackson, President of the international coalition Great Lakes United. "This report examines the promises made then with so much pomp and circumstance by the Great Lakes governors and premiers. It finds that most of those promises have been neglected. " Twelve years later new powerful forces of climate change, the global economy and growth are having serious impacts on our Great Lakes water resources. These growing stresses coupled with the continuing neglect of promises to sustain our water resources could lead to future water scarcities and conflicts among users. These conflicts will increase political and social instability for future generations of Basin residents.

### **BACKGROUND**

When they signed the Great Lakes Charter, governments stated that "As trustees of the Basin's natural resources, the Great Lakes States and Provinces have a shared duty to protect, conserve and manage the renewable but finite waters of the Great Lakes Basin for the use, benefit and enjoyment of their citizens, including generations yet to come". They committed to:

- . cooperative planning and management of the hydrologic system as one ecosystem,
- . cooperative monitoring, data collection and conservation programs,
- . notice and consultation among all parties prior to the approval of any significant diversion,
- . a Basin Water Resources Program to guide future Great Lakes decision-making and
- . legislation to regulate and manage diversions with the stated intent that  
"diversions of Basin water resources will not be allowed if individually or cumulatively they would have significant adverse impacts on lake levels, in-basin uses and the Great Lakes Ecosystem".

"Twelve years later there is no management plan" said Sarah Miller of the Canadian Environmental Law Association, "Most of the provisions of the Charter continue to be ignored".

## **BROKEN PROMISES**

Our report, researched for over two years, contains numerous examples of this neglect and lack of progress. The Great Lakes Region continues to lead the globe as per capita wasters of water. Water conservation programs are much more the exception than the rule and are only found in areas with serious groundwater shortages.

Little ecosystem co-operation is occurring among Great Lakes jurisdictions. Indeed, disputes over diversions have occurred over the past several years. Illinois and Michigan had a prolonged dispute over the volumes being diverted at the Chicago diversion which eventually was mediated before it ended up in the US Supreme Court. Many controversial water diversion proposals are not being caught by the weak provisions of the Charter. A proposal for a large mine in Crandon, Wisconsin proposes to pump groundwater continuously from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi watershed for over 30 years. Other diversion proposals are being structured to avoid the provisions of the Charter. Akron, Ohio is proposing to divert water it takes from the Great Lakes to suburbs outside the Basin but is looking for substitute sources of water to divert back into the lakes so that their proposal will not trigger Great Lakes Charter requirements.

Twelve years ago the fear of large scale out-of-Basin water diversions fuelled the Charter. Now most diversion proposals are occurring closer to home. Research suggests that many areas neighbouring the Great Lakes are planning to turn to the Great Lakes for new supplies of water to feed their development pipedreams. These areas are Kenosha - Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin; Lowell, Indiana; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Chicago, Illinois; and New York City. If all of these "minor" diversions were allowed their cumulative impacts would equal that of one major diversion. Areas within the Great Lakes Basin are turning away from less polluted, cheaper groundwater supplies to more expensive to treat polluted surface waters in the belief that these supplies will be inexhaustible. York region north of Toronto has chosen this pipeline option to guarantee it will corner future development, but at what price?

Scientists in the Great Lakes are confident that climate change impacts are already being manifested in the Great Lakes. They predict they will bring significant drops in water levels, as well as an increase in damaging weather phenomena and health impacts. Droughts in the American continent will once again result in consideration of some of the large scale Great Lakes water diversion proposals that always surface whenever there is a drought.

"What right will the Great Lakes governments have to deny others water in a prolonged drought when they continue to squander and neglect their trust over one fifth of the world's fresh water?" asked John Birnbaum, Executive Director of the Georgian Bay Association.

The fate of the Great Lakes is increasingly being determined by economic forces as governments are moving away from hands-on resource management, toward deregulation, and privatization. There are signs in the Great Lakes that decisions over the allocation of water resources might soon be determined by forces far outside of the Great Lakes Basin. Free trade is contributing to the commoditization of water in North America and trade panels

are beginning to determine the use of natural resources as "goods" to be traded. Private multinational water companies are eagerly scrambling to secure a place in future water markets. Their presence is already being encouraged by governments in Ontario and Quebec where they are buying up contracts for Great Lakes water distribution systems, operations and provision of future water supplies.

## **LONG OVERDUE REMEDIES**

"Governments have wasted a lot of the time they have had over the past twelve years to protect and conserve the Great Lakes. Stresses which they could have remediated and prevented are now escalating", said John Jackson. "This is why we are today launching our public campaign to have a Sustainable Great Lakes Water Strategy implemented by the year 2005 with a target of a 50% reduction in per capita water use. This would bring water use within ranges now the norm in European countries".

In our report we present a blueprint to achieve this goal. We call on governments to act on the political will of their citizens to strengthen protection by amending the Great Lakes Charter to:

- . lower the trigger level for scrutiny of diversions and consumptive uses,
- . Include First Nations and Tribes and the International Joint Commission and federal governments as parties to the renewed Charter,
- . ensure that there is consistent data gathered that traces the cumulative impacts of all water withdrawals, and
- . Incorporate these undertakings into binding legislation and regulations.

Many other tangible tools to achieve a Sustainable Great Lakes Water Strategy are contained in the recommendations section of this report.

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CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ASSOCIATION  
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DU DROIT DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT



An international coalition to conserve and protect the  
Great Lakes/St. Lawrence River ecosystem