

## **The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement: Speak out *now* to set the U.S.-Canada strategy for protecting our Great Lakes!**

Since 1972 the United States and Canada have established shared goals and strategies to protect the Great Lakes through a formal agreement—the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Over the last 39 years this Agreement has only been modified three times. Currently, our nations are completing negotiations on a new, updated version of the Agreement. Very little information is available to the public on the specific language and provisions in the new Agreement. **Public comment on the new Agreement will close on September 20, 2011!**

During these final weeks, it is imperative that U.S. and Canadian citizens and their elected officials impress upon the U.S. State Department and Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade the essential elements that will make a new Agreement effective and valued. Without access to the details, our communications need to send a clear message about priorities that citizens' groups have been raising for years. Consider stressing some of the following key points in your comments. A helpful briefing document, [High Stakes for Our Great Lakes Agreement](#), can be found at the Great Lakes United Web site, <http://www.glu.org/>, along with answers to [frequently asked questions](#) and other materials on the Agreement.

### ***Substance of the Agreement***

- ▶ **A visionary strategy for the 21st Century.** The new Agreement must retain its goals of restoring the Lakes and protecting them from toxic pollution, and also expand them to meet today's and tomorrow's challenges. This means addressing threats from climate disruption, ending the onslaught of invasive species, stopping habitat loss and preventing new pollution threats. This includes not only research and sharing information, but actions to prevent further damage and restore the ecosystem.
- ▶ **No Backsliding.** The governments calling a toxic pollutant a “chemical substance” doesn't make it less toxic. Commitments to prevent toxic pollution in the lakes must remain a pillar of the Agreement, and “risk management” should not replace goals to prevent and eliminate toxic discharges into the Great Lakes.
- ▶ **Finish the clean-up and restoration of contaminated harbors.** Since the last revision of the Agreement in 1987, only four of the 43 contaminated “hot spots” (a.k.a. Areas of Concern) have been cleaned up enough to reach initial restoration targets. The other sites continue to degrade water quality and pose health risks. The Agreement needs to reinvigorate commitments on both sides of the border to get this job done, done well, and on a faster timeline.
- ▶ **Protect each lake from headwaters to deep waters – the watershed approach.** Lakewide management plans (LaMPs) need to recognize that many problems in the lakes start upstream, and solutions need to include tributaries and groundwater as integral parts of the ecosystem to be effective. And, while toxic pollution is a major concern (the current focus of LaMPs), so is polluted runoff from fields and streets, sewer overflows, habitat loss, groundwater contamination, the spread of invasive species, pollution and habitat destruction from mining, and more. We must embrace the ecosystem approach by planning for the whole system and all the threats, and use consistent planning approaches across all the lakes.

## ***Governing, Leadership and Implementation***

► **Strengthen the independent role of the International Joint Commission (IJC).** The IJC has played a critical role in advancing Great Lakes Science and telling the public and our governments the hard truth about conditions in the lakes, emerging threats, and where our governments are falling short of living up to their commitments. This role was diminished following the 1987 Agreement changes, and further weakened by budget cuts that have reduced the IJC's resources and capacities in recent decades. Governments often suppress bad news and equivocate rather than acknowledge their own limitations and failings. Now more than ever, we need the independent voice of the IJC to play a strong role as critic of progress under the Agreement and guardians of the lakes.

► **Commit to timelines, benchmarks, and measures for success.** We need specificity, not just symbolic language. Plans without deadlines will languish just as they have for the last 24 years. We need dates, clearly identified benchmarks for measuring progress, including straightforward measures of water quality, biological health, ecological resilience and human safety. Also, in those cases where the commitment in the new Agreement is to develop a plan, the Agreement should state the date by which the plan will be completed.

► **Commit to a role for the public and other key stakeholders on the proposed new binational governing body for the Agreement and other key committees.** Without the participation of non-governmental public representatives, the new Executive Committee that oversees implementation of the Agreement will continue to operate with minimal citizen involvement and largely behind closed doors. Critical decisions and ongoing assessment about the Agreement's implementation need to include more affected parties, citizens and stakeholders to improve transparency, accountability, and provide broader perspectives.

► **Commit to science leadership.** The new Agreement must restore and support the role of investigatory science and early warning capacity that it once fostered through government scientists and the IJC. We need strategic science to understand the increasing complexity of interactions in the Great Lakes, coupled with transparent approaches to investigations and dissemination of scientific information.

► **Commit to accountability measures.** The Agreement should specify that the IJC's and the Parties' formal reports will be reviewed by Congress and Parliament, including oversight hearings and citizen testimony. The federal governments should establish implementation Agreements with affected provinces, states, First Nations, tribes and métis delineating their respective roles and responsibilities. Citizens should have the right to petition the governments to take action under the Agreement. Governments should commit sufficient money and staffing to complete implementation.

► **Rebuild the binational constituency for Great Lakes protection.** The governments of both nations must expand and support opportunities for collaboration between scientists, government officials, public agencies, citizen organizations and multiple stakeholders. Examples include convening binational task groups to achieve specific objectives, participatory sessions at meetings, citizen roles on boards and committees, vastly improved reporting and communication on strategies and actions, and using outcome-based work plans that can inform constituencies of strategies, actions and likely impacts.

**Written comments can be submitted via email only until September 20.** Please submit them to [glwqa-aeqgl@ec.gc.ca](mailto:glwqa-aeqgl@ec.gc.ca) AND [glwqa@glnpo.net](mailto:glwqa@glnpo.net). Please also copy your members of Congress or Parliament to let them know you are concerned about the outcome of the negotiation and want them to communicate with the negotiators on your behalf. **Public Forums** are being held in **Toronto, September 8, 2011** (1 pm to 5pm EDT, register at [glwqa-aeqgl@ec.gc.ca](mailto:glwqa-aeqgl@ec.gc.ca)) and **Chicago, September 13, 2011** (9am to 1pm CDT, register at [glwqa@glnpo.net](mailto:glwqa@glnpo.net)). A public Webinar is also being held on September 13 from 1pm to 4pm CDT, register at <https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/782986200>. Information about the forums and a copy of the negotiators' presentation can be found at: [http://binational.net/glwqa\\_2011public\\_e.html](http://binational.net/glwqa_2011public_e.html).

You can also keep up on developments via the [AGREEMENT WATCH](#) blog on the [GLU Web site](http://www.glu.org), [www.glu.org](http://www.glu.org).