

F A C T S H E E T



Citizen's Guide to Restoring the Great Lakes

A Task Force Appointed by President Bush Recently Issued a \$20 Billion Action Plan to Clean Up the Great Lakes. Here's A Look at the Plan—and Why You need to Urge Elected Officials to Support the Plan Today.

Our Lives, Our Livelihoods

The Great Lakes are a wonder of the world and a place millions of people call home. We depend on the Lakes for our drinking water, economic vitality, and places we enjoy with our families.

The Lakes Are in Trouble

These amazing lakes aren't healthy. Scientists are telling us that pollution, habitat destruction and invasive species like the zebra mussel are damaging the lakes to the point where the ecosystem is dangerously out of balance. We see the evidence in widespread beach closings, contaminated fish, and zebra mussels on our beaches, boats and piers. To date, efforts to control these problems have been stymied by a lack of funding and coordination. It doesn't have to be this way.

A Blueprint for Action

In 2004, President Bush issued an executive order to bring together the Great Lakes states, federal agencies, local communities, and Tribes to craft an action plan to restore the health of the Great Lakes. In July 2005, the group released for public comment a draft of the plan for 60 days of public comment.

The plan contains many strong recommendations that would help restore the Great Lakes by cleaning up pollution, ending sewage dumping into the lakes, preventing the introduction of aquatic invasive species, and restoring wetlands and other habitat for fish and wildlife.

The Action Plan is a Solid First Step

The action plan provides effective solutions to the problems that plague the lakes. It is a practical first step that, if implemented and fully funded, will lay a solid foundation for long-term Great Lakes restoration

How the Action Plan Helps Restore the Great Lakes

The action plan contains many solid recommendations that will help nurse the Great Lakes back to health so that water is safe to drink, fish are safe to eat, and beaches are safe to swim in. The following solutions in the action plan need to be supported:

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- The action plan must be funded. There are no shortcuts to restoring the Lakes, so let's get the job done right. To restore and protect our Great Lakes, state and federal elected officials need to invest in cleanup, habitat protection and closing the door to invasive species;
- To keep beaches clean, safe, and open, the plan dedicates \$13.7 billion to improve sewage systems and halt raw sewage from spilling into the Great Lakes;
- To shut the door on aquatic invasive species, like the zebra mussel or the Asian Carp, and to promote a thriving Great Lakes fishery, the plan urges the enactment of comprehensive federal law—the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act;
- To clean up pollution, the plan allocates \$2 billion to clean up the most toxic areas of the Great Lakes by 2020;
- To provide a home to wildlife and fish—and preserve hunting, fishing and birding opportunities—the plan dedicates \$550 million to restore 550,000 acres of wetlands.

You Can Make a Difference

Great Lakes restoration must start today. Every day we wait the job gets bigger. We have a responsibility to help keep the Great Lakes healthy.

You can make a difference by attending a public hearing and/or submitting public comments. You have until September 9, 2005.

Read the plan and submit comments by visiting www.gllrc.us.

Or, visit www.restorethelakes.org to learn how to get involved in the national effort to restore the Great Lakes.

Now is the time to have your voice heard! Support the released action plan. And urge elected officials to take action on behalf of families and future generation of people by funding the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes.

A Look Inside the \$20 Billion Action Plan to Clean Up the Great Lakes

The Great Lakes are not healthy, and they are not healing themselves. An action plan released in July 2005 strives to solve many problems facing the Great Lakes. Here's how:

Problem: Habitat destruction threatens Great Lakes wildlife and fish.

Solution: To provide a home for wildlife and promote a thriving, self-sustaining native fishery, the plan calls for:

- A net increase of at least 550,000 acres of wetlands, supported by at least \$550 million in funding for voluntary purchases
- Support for restoring the physical integrity of a specific number or percentage of Great Lakes tributaries
- Support for establishing target flows that mimic natural flow regimes for all major Great Lakes tributaries

Problem: Raw sewage and other pollution discharged into the Great Lakes pose a threat to public health; it has resulted in closed beaches, boil-water notices and fish consumption advisories.

Solution: To ensure that Great Lakes water is safe to drink, beaches are safe to swim and fish are safe to eat, the plan calls for:

- An increase of at least \$8 billion in funding for reducing Great Lakes sewage system overflows, with a 55%–45% federal-local cost share
- At least \$50 million over five years for state and EPA sewage system overflow programs
- State and EPA enforcement action for communities not firmly scheduling sewage overflow fixes

Problem: Non-native aquatic invasive species like the zebra mussel are entering the Great Lakes and disrupting the aquatic food web, threatening the Great Lakes fishery, and costing taxpayers billions of dollars in damage and control costs.

Solution: To shut the door on aquatic invasive species and promote a thriving Great Lakes fishery, the plan calls for:

- Enact the currently proposed U.S. National Aquatic Invasive Species Act
- By 2011 assure invasive species cannot be introduced to the Great Lakes via ballast water or canal flow
- Empower regional action should federal measures prove ineffective
- Develop the option of shore-based ballast water treatment infrastructure
- Enable the option of closing the Great Lakes to ocean-going traffic by developing plans to transship goods from a depot at the mouth of the lakes
- Develop means to allow the option of closing canals that link the Great Lakes and other U.S. drainage basins by 2011
- Increase funding for addressing the ecological impact of existing invasive species

Problem: U.S. and Canadian authorities have identified 43 harbors and watersheds in the Great Lakes basin as the most-polluted in the region due to widespread pollution, habitat destruction and hazardous waste.

Solution: To clean up the most-polluted waters in the Great Lakes, the action plan calls for:

- An investment of at least \$2 billion to clean up all basin "Area of Concern" toxic hot spots by 2020; and,
- Funding to assure availability and use of non-polluting destruction technologies

Problem: Nonpoint source pollution from agricultural runoff and other sources impairs water quality, threatens human health, damages flora and fauna in the Lakes, reduces recreational opportunities and increases the cost of treating drinking water and dredging our harbors and marinas.

Solution: To protect the health of people and wildlife, the plan calls for:

- Net increase of at least 1 million acres of buffer strips, supported by at least \$1 billion for voluntary purchases
- Significant reductions in nutrient pollution, particularly from animal feeding operations
- Increased funding for urban green practices and infrastructure

Problem: Despite improvement over the last 30 years, toxic pollution continues to pose a threat to the health of people and wildlife, resulting in fish consumption advisories in all five Great Lakes.

Solution: To establish and maintain the chemical integrity of the Great Lakes, the plan calls for:

- An investment of \$115 million per year for pollution prevention project implementation, agricultural toxics elimination, and consistent, basin-wide fish consumption advisories

Problem: Unwise land use, agricultural practices and industrial operation have caused widespread changes to the Great Lakes ecosystem to the point where the system is out of balance and unable to heal itself.

Solution: To ensure that economic growth and environmental health go hand-in-hand, the plan calls for:

- Revising policies that result in public investment in communities that encourage sustainable practices rather than urban sprawl;
- Modifying current agricultural price support systems to encourage sustainable practices such as conservation tillage and buffer strips;
- Practicing manufacturing and management that use resources more effectively and efficiently;
- Promoting sustainable forestry practices through private sector programs, tax incentives for keeping private lands in productive timber rather than development, and equal sustainable forest standards for “green wood” for public and private sources;
- Providing incentives to develop renewable energy technologies, energy efficiency and pollution prevention in the business sector.

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