

February 10, 2009

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington St.,  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States of America  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Prime Minister Harper and President Obama:

In a few days, the two of you will meet in Ottawa to discuss topics of deep concern to both the United States and Canada. Our two great democracies have a long-standing tradition of dialogue, respect, and cooperation. This has sustained peace and prosperity and enhanced the security and quality of life for people from Canada and the U.S. alike. As you grapple with today's significant challenges, we look forward to a continued spirit of bi-national partnership—especially in the arenas of economic recovery and environmental leadership.

Since 1972, the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* has played an important role in shaping the strategies of both our nations to protect and restore the freshwater wonder we hold in common: the Great Lakes. At your meeting on February 19<sup>th</sup>, we urge you to commit your leadership, and that of our nations, to renewed efforts to meet our shared commitments under the Agreement, and to forge a revitalized Agreement that will address the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As you discuss the economic challenges of our nations, the future of the Great Lakes is centrally important in this discussion. Protection and restoration of these waters benefits numerous economic drivers for both nations.

We need to reinvigorate efforts in both nations to safeguard this resource at a time when the Great Lakes are beleaguered by invasive species, old pollution languishing in harbor bottoms, new chemical pollution, habitat loss, the return of dead zones, impacts of climate change, and other threats. Such threats limit the economic potential of the region, which is of fundamental importance to employment and wealth generation for both nations.

A thriving Great Lakes system nurtures our shared economy and enhances our nations' cooperative relationships. A revitalized *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* will provide a new framework and platform to help achieve our shared goals. We seek your commitments to move forward with Agreement deliberations through a serious and concerted effort that will address the challenge of Great Lakes protection and restoration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In particular, we ask that the joint communiqué at the conclusion of your February 19, 2009 meeting include the following commitments:

- To formally state that, beginning this year, a revitalization and revision of the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* will be undertaken within the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges; and
- To involve the Great Lakes public in the decision-making process around revising the concepts and language in the Agreement, including purpose, scope, and public involvement.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to a successful meeting next week, and to working with both of your administrations to renew and strengthen our Agreement to protect and restore the Great Lakes.

A short background paper with additional information about the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* is attached.

Sincerely,

Joann Cavaletto  
**American Federation of Government  
Employees, Local 3908, Union of  
Great Lakes Research Labs**  
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**People for Safe Drinking Water**  
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**Toronto Area of Concern  
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Toronto, Ontario

Sault Ste Marie, Michigan & Ontario

Grenetta Thomassey

**Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council**

Petosky, Michigan

Sandy Bihn

**Western Lake Erie Waterkeeper**

Oregon, Ohio

## **U.S.-Canada Great Lakes Policy: Background**

One hundred years ago, on January 11, 1909, the United States and Canada entered into the first environmental treaty in the world: the *Boundary Waters Treaty*. This committed both countries to ensuring that activities in one country do not negatively affect the quality or quantity of water shared by the two countries. This year we celebrate that achievement.

One of the most important consequences of that Treaty is the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* between Canada and the United States. First signed by Prime Minister Trudeau and President Nixon in 1972, and subsequently revised in 1978 and 1987, this Agreement has led to major initiatives to clean up and protect the Great Lakes. The Agreement committed the two countries to “restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity” of the Lakes; prohibit “the discharge of toxic substances in toxic amounts”; and to virtually eliminate “the discharge of any or all persistent toxic substances.”

It is now 22 years since the Agreement was updated. While we have made progress, these commitments have not yet been fully met, and new challenges demand our attention as well. Leaders in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River region, including federal, provincial, state, first nation, tribal, and municipal governments, as well as environmental and wildlife conservation groups, scientists, industry, and the broader public, believe that now is the time to update and revitalize the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement*.

### **➤ Why the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* Matters**

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River region is home to over 40 million people—30 percent of Canada’s population and 10 percent of the U.S. population. The Brookings Institute found that the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin forms the third largest economic unit in the world, topped only by the full US economy and Japan. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River economy is larger than the economies of such powerhouses as China, India, Germany and the United Kingdom.

The lubricant for this massive economic engine is the Great Lakes. This global treasure supports and nurtures manufacturing, agriculture and fisheries, while attracting millions of tourists every year with their grandeur and vitality. It also provides a quality of life, including access to outdoor recreation and natural beauty that can attract creative entrepreneurs in the region’s growing “knowledge” economy.

Unfortunately, decades of environmental degradation of this shared Great Lakes ecosystem and resource have lessened this competitive advantage and have brought Great Lakes health to the brink of collapse. In a study of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River economy, the Brookings Institute conclude that improved

environmental protection is essential for the economic well-being of the Great Lakes region. They write that:

“... effective priority protection demands a bi-national effort encompassing the entire water system through the St. Lawrence. As such, the president and Canadian prime minister should join to ... articulate a bi-national set of priorities for Great Lakes-St. Lawrence restoration. These priorities should be based on strong consensus and scientific rationale, and should include specific recommendations for actions, investments, and projects.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* is the most appropriate mechanism to articulate many of these bi-national goals, priorities, and commitments.

### ➤ **The Status of the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement***

In September 2007, the Canadian and U.S. governments completed a major review of the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement*. More than 400 officials from all levels of government, together with citizens and non-governmental representatives, participated in this 18-month review. In addition, the International Joint Commission held public hearings on the issue prior to the beginning of the formal government review. However, the review itself was carried out under previous administrations in both countries, and should be revisited in light of changing circumstances and new opportunities.

The main conclusions from the review included:

- As a result of the U.S. and Canada working together through the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement*, we have made considerable strides in improving the quality of the Great Lakes ecosystem.
- New challenges have arisen since 1987 that the current Agreement does not address. These include the following: impacts on water quality and threats to human health from a new wave of toxic substances we are only now becoming aware of; the widespread ecological and economic damage from invasive species; the impacts of urban and suburban sprawl on water quality, groundwater-recharge, and habitat; changes in water levels, and the growing evidence of changes in precipitation patterns, water temperature, and other effects of climate change.
- The *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* needs to be renewed and revised so it can continue to play a significant role in framing the bi-national Great Lakes agenda and priorities to protect and restore the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River ecosystem.

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<sup>1</sup> John Austin, Elaine Dezenski & Britany Affolter-Caine, *The Vital Connection: Reclaiming Great Lakes Economic Leadership in the Bi-National US-Canadian Region*, Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings, March 2008, p. 21.

In addition, leaders throughout the region have raised serious concerns about aspects of Agreement implementation, including:

- The lack of mechanisms to ensure domestic compliance with Agreement goals and objectives;
- The erosion of scientific capacity in research, monitoring and forecasting;
- Decreased transparency and public involvement in decision-making processes.

The meeting offers the opportunity for both leaders to express their commitment to honor the GLWQA in federal laws on both sides of the border, and to address these challenges.

➤ **Commitments Needed Now**

The formal government review of the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* has been completed. Now, the governments and the Great Lakes community must seize the opportunity to revitalize and revise this landmark agreement. We ask that the joint communiqué at the conclusion of the meeting of Prime Minister Harper and President Obama include the following commitments:

- to formally state that , beginning this year, a revitalization and revision of the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* will be undertaken within the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges; and,
- To involve the Great Lakes public in the decision-making process around revising the concepts and language in the Agreement including purpose, scope, and public involvement.

For more information, contact John Jackson of Great Lakes United at [jjackson@glu.org](mailto:jjackson@glu.org) or at 519-744-7503.