

UPDATE ON GREAT LAKES CHARTER ANNEX AGREEMENTS

On Wednesday **January 25, 2006**, members of the **Great Lakes Charter Annex Advisory Panel met** at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. Rob Messervey, Lands and Waters Branch, Ministry of Natural Resources for the Province of Ontario, began the luncheon meeting by introducing the Hon. David Ramsey MPP, Minister of Natural Resources and Deputy Minister Gail L. Beggs to the Panel members and their guests.

Both the Minister and Deputy Minister thanked all those present for their input and advice over the course of more than a year as interested and concerned stakeholders in protecting the waters of the Great Lakes Basin. This historic process implemented by the Ministry in Dec. 2004, led to a final agreement being signed in December of 2005 between Ontario, Quebec and the eight Great Lakes States. This agreement will now provide newer and stronger protections for the Basin. Minister Ramsey and his Deputy Minister presented each member of the Panel with a letter of appreciation and a copy of the book *Life of Water* including an essay by David Suzuki. The photographers *pioneered an art form, using their lenses to create social change*.

After lunch, Mr. Messervey gave us an update on the implementation activities and timelines. Ontario's initial support to the Agreement begins with the creation of the new ten member Regional Body and the appointment of its representative. Using a Power Point presentation, he then briefly outlined the key activities of this Body beginning with the implementation of legislation by all Parties and consistent with the terms of the Agreement. This was followed by comments on the development of regional water conservation goals and objectives; baseline data for determining new or increased water withdrawals, diversions, consumptive uses; mechanisms to facilitate scientific, technical interaction, data exchange and dialogue; and the assessment of water conservation programs.

The meeting then focused on whether the role that Ontario should be to develop of an overall implementation strategy or to focus on specific priorities within the agreement such as conservation, science and research, intra-basin transfers, etc. The question that was uppermost in the minds of those in the MNR Working Group as well as those on the Panel was who amongst the Parties would take the upper hand and step forward as a leader on these issues. Elizabeth May from the Sierra Club felt that a draft by Ontario on conservation should be developed that represents a high standard for the other Parties to use as their example. In other words, let Ontario begin by setting the level of the bar high for the rest of the Regional Body.

Many concerns were made about the lack of coordination between legislation that already exists, and legislation which is yet to be approved, the work completed by some municipalities in conservation, etc. It was agreed that this Panel would meet again with the MNR Working Group providing a *gap analysis* and the Panel members forming specific issue-related sub-committees on which they could provide the necessary expertise. This would be Ontario's commitment to implementing the Agreement and this could take one to two years.

It will be a struggle for members to take this next step as there are so many unknown factors, i.e. what is already in existence that can be used, how will the legislation of the other Parties impact on the work of the panel, what ministry will take the lead in bringing this agreement to full implementation. I think the panel has a lengthy and difficult job ahead of them.

Linda MacGregor