



Great Lakes Restoration and the 2008 Presidential Election: An Issue to Help Expand Candidate Support in Key Swing States

Great Lakes states have helped decide the last several presidential elections and figure to play a pivotal role in the 2008 presidential race.

1. **Great Lakes states hold one-quarter of the nation’s electoral votes:**
 - Illinois 21 electoral votes
 - Indiana 11 electoral votes
 - Michigan 17 electoral votes
 - Minnesota 10 electoral votes
 - New York 31 electoral votes
 - Ohio 20 electoral votes
 - Pennsylvania 21 electoral votes
 - Wisconsin 10 electoral votes

2. **Great Lakes states include five of the nine battleground states.** The Kerry and Bush campaigns focused much of their attention in the 2004 race in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania – states likely to play an important role in the 2008 elections.

3. **Great Lakes primaries will play a key role in selecting each party’s 2008 Presidential nominee.**

State	Primary Date (D)
Michigan	January 15
Illinois	February 5
Minnesota	February 5
New York	February 5
Wisconsin	February 19
Ohio	March 4
Pennsylvania	April 22
Indiana	May 6

To win in these hotly contested states, Presidential candidates will have to reach out to unaffiliated and Independent voters. Great Lakes restoration is a cross-cutting issue that can help both Republican and Democratic presidential candidates expand their voter base, as proven by polling and research.

Efforts to clean up the great bodies of water that give this region its name – the Great Lakes – stand out as an issue that can enhance an aspect of quality of life



that means a great deal to the region's voters. The 2005 survey research conducted by Belden Russonello & Stewart and VJ Breglio Consulting reveal that Great Lakes restoration is a highly salient issue that transcends political party and ideology for voters in the region.

Background: Healthy Lakes, Healthy Lives

Great Lakes restoration has been gaining momentum and widespread media coverage since the Governors of the Great Lakes states outlined 9 priority areas for the Great Lakes and regional stakeholders crafted a plan to restore the Great Lakes around those priorities. That effort attracted the participation of 1,500 citizens, business leaders, advocates, Tribal representatives, and state and federal agency officials. It led to the 2005 release of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy, a comprehensive plan to restore the lakes. The strategy has been translated into federal legislation that has received bi-partisan support.

The Strategy and legislation come at a critical time. Sewage contamination, aquatic invasive species like the zebra mussel, and habitat destruction are wreaking ecological and economic havoc on the lakes to the point where the Great Lakes are in serious trouble and need immediate help.

Restoring the Great Lakes is the main goal of the Healing Our Waters®-Great Lakes Coalition, which is led by the National Wildlife Federation and the National Parks Conservation Association, and consists of over 100 civic, fishing, hunting, conservation and environmental organizations, as well as zoos, aquariums and museums.

The coalition encourages Republican and Democratic candidates seeking the Presidency to show their support for Great Lakes restoration by committing to opposing diversions of Great Lakes water and to funding the implementation of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy within five years.

The coalition is available to help your campaign organize events around Great Lakes restoration, as well as to provide support and answer any questions.

This kit provides:

- I. Talking points on Great Lakes restoration
- II. A summary of current public opinion on Great Lakes restoration
- III. Grassroots, organizational and political support for the restoration plan
- IV. Key Facts on the Great Lakes



I. Talking points on Great Lakes restoration

The survey research reveals that the most effective communications on Lakes restoration provides a combination of appeals to the values voters hold for the Lakes, alerts to the urgent threats to the Lakes, and highlights of the immediate benefit to the region's quality of life that come with implementing solutions to the Lakes' problems.

- **The Great Lakes are essential to the economic and cultural identity of our region. Thirty million people depend on the Great Lakes for their drinking water.**
- **Today, the health of our Lakes is seriously threatened by problems such as untreated sewage and invasive species.**
- **The good news is we have manageable solutions to these problems. **The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy** is a comprehensive plan to modernize sewage treatment, clean-up polluted harbors, restore wetlands, and prevent unwanted, new species from invading the lakes. Each of these steps is essential if we are to restore the lakes and safeguards our Great Lakes way of life.**
- **It is time we use these solutions. Every day we wait, the problems get worse and the solutions get more costly. We must act now to restore the health of the Great Lakes.**
- **Congress must enact and fund **the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy** – to protect our, our drinking water, our economy, our health and our way of life.**
- **People from all walks of life support this strategy for Great Lakes restoration, including thousands of Great Lakes citizens, anglers, hunters, scientists, conservationists, as well as mayors of Great Lakes cities, Great Lakes governors and federal agencies.**

II. Current public opinion on Great Lakes restoration

Overview: The 2005 Belden Russonello & Stewart and VJ Breglio survey shows that restoration of the Great Lakes is a highly relevant issue among Democratic, Republican and Independent voters in the Lakes region.



The poll reveals that voters in the region have a strong connection to the Great Lakes and a strong commitment to investing in the health of the Lakes. While voters' knowledge of the threats is limited, upon learning about the Lakes' problems, large segments become strongly supportive of government action to combat those problems.

Strong connection to Lakes

Great Lakes residents hold strong views about the Lakes as a resource, a treasure, and a source of regional pride.

- Nearly seven in ten voters (68%) say the Lakes are “vital to the region’s economy.”
- 59% say the Lakes are a place they go for recreation.
- 58% describe the Lakes as a “natural wonder of the world.”

Region’s voters believe the Lakes are threatened

- A majority (53%) of the regions’ voters describe the overall condition of the Lake as just OK or poor.
- Nearly half (46%) say the term “vulnerable” well describes the condition of their Lakes.

Voters express concern over specific threats to their Lakes, saying the following hurt the Lakes:

- Sewage waste (87%)
- Mercury contamination (82%)
- The destruction of wetlands due to development (81%)
- Invasive species such as zebra mussels (72%)
- Construction on or near the Lakes (67%)

Restoration of the Lakes is not a partisan issue

All respondents in the survey were asked the question: “The governments of the states surrounding the Great Lakes are proposing that each state in the region, including your state, spend one billion dollars of taxpayer money over five years to clean up toxic waste and bacteria, protect wetlands, and prevent invasive species to improve the condition of the Great Lakes. On a ten point scale, where one means



strongly oppose and ten means strongly favor, how much do you favor or oppose spending this money on the Great Lakes?"

- More than six in ten Great Lakes voters (63%) say they would support the plan for Lakes restoration (answering 6,7,8,9,or 10) and 46% are strong supporters (8,9, or 10).
- Fewer than four in ten (36%, saying 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) would oppose the plan, with only 16% vigorously oppose the idea (1, 2, or 3).

This plan for coordinated state action find support across a range of constituents in the Lakes region, showing that voters’ commitment to the health of the Lakes and support for restoration transcend political ideologies.

- 66% of Democrats support the plan
- 58% of Republicans are in support, and
- 64% of Independent voters also support restoration efforts.

Great Lakes Collaboration Strategy and Legislation contain popular solutions

The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy and legislation being considered in Congress include solutions to improve the Lakes that the research shows to be broadly popular across party lines. Below are specific improvements to the Lakes to which a broad array of voters assign high priorities.

Here are some actions that could be taken to improve the condition of the Great Lakes. Knowing that we cannot do everything at once, how high a priority would you give to each on a ten-point scale, with one meaning very low priority and ten meaning you give it an extremely high priority. [% saying "8-10"]				
	All Voters	Dems.	Reps.	Indtps.
Modernizing city waste treatment plants	66%	72%	64%	64%
Inspect ships as they enter the Lakes to prevent invasive species	66%	69%	61%	65%
Reduce runoff polluting rivers feeding Lakes	54%	61%	48%	52%
Tax incentives for landowners to protect/preserve wetlands	52%	55%	49%	51%



Reasons for supporting Lakes restoration plan

Among the region's voters, the strongest reasons to support government-funded improvements to the Lakes are in part, based on the values voters hold for the Lakes and, in part related to the clear threats posed to the Lakes.

Values-based messages:

- We need to protect the Lakes so our children and grandchildren can experience the Lakes the way we have (67% of voters find this statement very persuasive; 75% of Democrats; 59% of Republicans; 66% of Independents).
- The government spent billions of dollars to restore the Florida Everglades and the Great Lakes are at least as important as the Everglades (65% of voters; 67% of Democrats; 61% of Republicans; and 66% of Independents).
- One-fifth of the world's fresh water supply is right here in our backyard. We should spend whatever it takes to keep it healthy (63% of voters; 71% of Democrats; 58% of Republicans; and 60% of Independents).

Health-threat messages:

- Bacteria from untreated sewage and outdated water treatment plants have caused beach closings and sometimes-serious illness for swimmers and residents who drink the water (59% of voters find this statement very persuasive; 66% of Democrats; 52% of Republicans; and 59% of Independents).
- Toxic pollutants such as mercury are passed on to fish, then to people, causing birth defects, brain damage, and other health problems (58% of voters; 66% of Democrats; 49% of Republicans; and 58% of Independents).

Another reason for action: Lakes' problems get worse and more costly

A majority of voters (57%) in the region also find very persuasive another argument for that speaks to the urgency of cleaning up the Lakes sooner rather than later:

- We should act now because scientists say problems in the Lakes will only get worse. Pushing our problems off until tomorrow is expensive and counter productive. (65% of Democrats say find this statement very persuasive; 49% of Republicans; and 56% of Independents).



III. Grassroots, organizational and political support for Lakes restoration plan

The Great Lakes restoration plan is endorsed by a broad and diverse coalition of the region's citizens, city, local, state and federal officials, Congressional representatives, the business community, citizens groups, recreational and outdoor groups, conservationists and environmentalists, universities, aquariums, zoos and museums.

The following groups and officials endorse the Great Lakes restoration plan:

Congressional Members:

IL

Rep. Melissa L. Bean
Rep. Danny K. Davis
Rep. Rahm Emanuel
Rep. Jesse L., Jr. Jackson
Rep. Mark Steven Kirk
Rep. Janice D. Schakowsky
Sen. Barack Obama

IN

Rep. Julia Carson

MI

Rep. Dave Camp
Rep. John Jr. Conyers
Rep. John D. Dingell
Rep. Peter Hoekstra
Rep. Carolyn C. Kilpatrick
Rep. Thaddeus G. McCotter
Rep. Dale E. Kildee
Rep. Joe Knollenberg
Rep. Sander M. Levin
Rep. Candice S. Miller
Rep. Mike J. Rogers
Rep. Timothy Walberg
Rep. Bart Stupak
Rep. Fred Upton
Sen. Debbie Stabenow

MN

Rep. Betty McCollum
Sen. Norm Coleman

NY

Rep. Brian Higgins
Rep. Steve Israel
Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney
Rep. John R. "Randy" Jr. Kuhl
Rep. Thomas M. Reynolds
Rep. Louise McIntosh Slaughter
Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton
Sen. Charles E. Schumer

OH

Rep. Paul E. Gilmore
Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones
Rep. Marcy Kaptur
Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich
Rep. Steven C. LaTourette
Rep. Ralph Regula
Rep. Betty Sutton
Rep. Tim Ryan
Sen. Sherrod Brown
Sen. George V. Voinovich

PA

Rep. Phil English
Sen. Robert P., Jr. Casey

WI

Rep. Tammy Baldwin
Rep. Steve, M.D. Kagen
Rep. Gwen Moore
Rep. Thomas E. Petri
Rep. Ron Kind
Rep. Paul Ryan
Rep. F. James, Jr. Sensenbrenner



Mayors:

IL

Michael D. Belsky, Highland Park
Richard M. Daley, Chicago
Richard H. Hyde, Waukegan
Lorraine H. Morton, Evanston

IN

Rudolph Clay, Gary
George Pabey, East Chicago
Joseph M. Stahura, Whiting

MI

George K. Heartwell, Grand Rapids
Robert G. Porter, Ferndale
Rob Sisson, Sturgis
Ray Tejchma, Ferrysburg

MN

Herb Bergson, Duluth
Mark Sandbo, Grand Marais

Governors:

IL

Rod R. Blagojevich

IN

Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr.

MI

Jennifer M. Granholm

MN

Tim Pawlenty

NY

Robert J. Duffy, Rochester

OH

Carleton S. Finkbeiner

PA

Joseph Sinnott, Erie

WI

Tom Barrett, Milwaukee
Gary Becker, Racine
Dave Ross, Superior

Coalition Members:

IL

Brookfield Zoo
Environment Illinois
Illinois Council for Trout Unlimited

OH

Audubon Ohio
Environment Ohio
Lake Erie Coastal Ohio



Illinois PIRG (ILPIRG)
John G. Shedd Aquarium
Prairie Rivers Network

IN

Indiana PIRG (INPIRG)
Save the Dunes

MI

Clinton River Watershed Council
Ecology Center
Grand River Sailing Club
John Ball Zoological Gardens
Kalamazoo River Protection Association
League of Women Voters of Michigan
Michigan Council of Trout Unlimited
Michigan Environmental Council
Michigan Land Use Institute
Michigan League of Conservation Voters
Michigan United Conservation Clubs
Michigan Wildlife Conservancy
Northwest Michigan Onsite Wastewater
Task Force
PIRG in Michigan (PIRGIM)
Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council
U of M SNRE
West Michigan Environmental Action
Council
Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay

NY

Audubon New York
Environmental Advocates of New York
New York Rivers United
New York State Zoo
Save the River
Seneca Park Zoo

National

Alliance for the Great Lakes
American Rivers
Audubon
Biodiversity Project
Center for Environmental Information
Citizens Campaign for the Environment
Corps Reform Network
County Executives of America

League of Ohio Sportsmen
League of Women Voters of Ohio
Ohio Environmental Council
Ohio League of Conservation Voters
Ohio PIRG (OPIRG)
Western Lake Erie Association
Winous Point Marsh Conservancy

MN

Audubon Minnesota
Environment Association for Great Lakes
Education
Minnesota Center for Environmental
Advocacy
Minnesota Conservation Federation
Minnesota Council of Trout Unlimited
Minnesota Environmental Partnership

WI

Clean Wisconsin
Discovery World
Friends of Milwaukee's Rivers
League of Women Voters of Wisconsin
River Alliance of Wisconsin
Wisconsin Association of Lakes
Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters
Wisconsin PIRG (WISPIRG)
Wisconsin Trout Unlimited
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

PA

Audubon Pennsylvania
Lake Erie Region Conservancy
Pennsylvania Environment

Canada

Georgian Bay Association
Georgian Bay Eco Museum
Nature Quebec



Delta Institute
Ducks Unlimited
Great Lakes Aquatic Habitat Network and Fund
Great Lakes Boating Federation
Great Lakes United
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Izaak Walton League of America
Lake Michigan Interleague Organization
Lake Superior Alliance
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Republicans for Environmental Protection
Sierra Club- Great Lakes Program
Trout Unlimited
Union of Concerned Scientists
U.S. PIRG

The Healthy Lakes Healthy Lives campaign is available to help your campaign with events, media work and coordinating with our coalition members.

Contact Us:

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IV. Key facts on the Great Lakes

A Crucial Resource

- The Great Lakes comprise one-fifth of the world's fresh water supply
- They provide drinking water to more than 30 million people
- They are the backbone of an outdoor recreational industry that generates \$6.5 billion from fishing and \$4.9 billion from hunting and \$6.4 billion from wildlife watching in the eight Lakes states.
- They account for 150,000 shipping industry jobs



- They are home to eight scenic National Parks.

Facing Urgent Threats

- Raw sewage dumped into the Great Lakes from outdated water treatment plants has contaminated drinking water and closed beaches across the Great Lakes.
- More than 24 billion gallons of untreated sewage enter the Great Lakes every year – the equivalent of 100 Olympic swimming pools of raw waste per day.
- In 2005, there were 2,740 days beach closings or advisories.
- Citizens are paying millions of dollars annually in damage and control costs stemming from the 185 aquatic invasive species such as the zebra mussel that have entered the Great Lakes.
- A new invasive species is discovered every 28 weeks on average.
- The Great Lakes are littered with toxic hotspots where hazardous chemicals have contaminated sediments and polluted the water.