



Great Lakes Commission des Grands Lacs

Eisenhower Corporate Park • 2805 South Industrial Hwy., Suite 100
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104-6791
Office (734) 971-9135 • Fax (734) 971-9150 • glc@glc.org

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December 8, 2008

Honorable Barack Obama
President Elect
Kluczynski Federal Building
230 South Dearborn St
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear President-Elect Obama:

The Great Lakes Commission congratulates you and welcomes your leadership as you prepare to assume the office of President. We are delighted to have a President from the Great Lakes region who knows and appreciates the importance of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River for our states, as well as the challenges we face in restoring, protecting and maximizing their benefits for the 32 million Americans who live in the Great Lakes region. Since 1955 the Great Lakes Commission has represented the Great Lakes states in promoting the orderly, integrated and comprehensive development, use and conservation of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.

We applaud the vision you outlined for Great Lakes restoration during your campaign for the presidency and we pledge our support to work with you and your administration to make it a reality. We are writing today to highlight some near-term Great Lakes priorities. Specifically, we are pleased to note your pledge to provide substantial funding for Great Lakes restoration efforts. This funding is needed now more than ever to help jump start our region's economy. It will enable us to implement effective solutions to the problems facing the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River while making the federal government an equal partner with state and local governments.

- **Include funding for Great Lakes infrastructure in an early economic stimulus package:** We have written to Congress identifying four critical areas where an upcoming economic stimulus package could support large-scale projects that can be implemented in the near term (see attached letter). This includes investments in wastewater infrastructure (including "green" infrastructure techniques such as allowing stormwater to infiltrate back into the ground rather than requiring expensive treatment and storage facilities), cleanup of toxic sediments, construction of a new lock at Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., and maintenance of Great Lakes ports and navigation channels. These investments will stimulate job growth while strengthening the regional economy and advancing restoration of the Great Lakes environment.
- **Appoint a high-level coordinator for the Great Lakes:** We believe that Great Lakes restoration and protection efforts will benefit greatly from a high-level manager to coordinate the many federal programs that impact the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River, while ensuring effective collaboration with state and local agencies and nongovernmental partners. While the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration has been a useful planning exercise that defined our priorities, implementation has been lacking. We urge you to designate an individual and give him or her authority to effectively direct resources from all federal agencies toward our common goal of restoring the Great Lakes.

Ensuring environmental and economic prosperity for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region through communications, policy research and development, and advocacy.



Honorable Barack Obama
December 8, 2008
Page Two

- **Establish a long-term funding mechanism to restore the Great Lakes:** Despite having a well-defined plan and a clear commitment from the region, federal funding for Great Lakes restoration has been inadequate. We urge you to work with Congress to establish a block grant program, trust fund or related mechanism to direct funds to critical Great Lakes restoration needs in an efficient and strategic manner. This could be part of a national program to implement large-scale restoration plans for critical ecosystems. Such a mechanism must include effective partnerships with the states, sound science, and clear accountability.

As you know, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River are a vital component of our eight-state regional economy. The Brookings Institution has estimated that fully implementing our Great Lakes restoration plan will yield up to \$50 billion in long-term benefits for our states. More recently, 25 metropolitan Chambers of Commerce from the Great Lakes region released a *Business Agenda for Economic Transformation in the Great Lakes Region*. Among other federal economic policy priorities, they recommend increased federal funding for transportation infrastructure; and leveraging the Great Lakes region's assets while implementing the Great Lakes restoration strategy.

We recognize the daunting challenges you will face beginning on January 20, 2009. We urge you to make Great Lakes restoration and economic development an early priority for your administration and we pledge our support and collaboration to work with you. We have an opportunity to create jobs, stimulate economic development and protect and restore vital freshwater resources in the eight-state Great Lakes region. We would welcome the chance to meet with members of your transition team to discuss these recommendations and we will follow up to arrange a convenient time. In the meantime, should your staff have questions, please contact Tim Eder, executive director (teder@glc.org) at 734-971-9135.

Sincerely,

Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn
Chairman

Attachment