

HEARING STATEMENT  
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
GREAT LAKES RESTORATION  
U.S. SENATOR MIKE DEWINE  
JULY 16, 2003

Good morning. I thank the Chairman, my good friend and fellow Ohioan, Senator Voinovich, for holding this important hearing today and for inviting me to be here to testify. It's good to see such a strong showing from the Great Lakes delegation. We all know that the Lakes are such an extraordinary treasure for our region.

The Great Lakes are a unique natural resource that need to be protected for future generations. They hold one-fifth of the world's surface freshwater, hold an estimated six quadrillion gallons of water, cover more than 94,000 square miles, and drain more than twice as much land. The Great Lakes ecosystem includes such diverse elements as northern evergreen forests, deciduous forests, lake plain prairies, and coastal wetlands. Over 30 of the basin's biological communities -- and over 100 species -- are globally rare or found only in the Great Lakes basin. The 637 state parks in the region accommodate more than 250 million visitors each year. And, the Great Lakes basin is home to more than 33 million people -- that's one-tenth of our entire U.S. population!

Unfortunately, the Great Lakes remain in a degraded state. I would like to cite GAO's April report that says, "Despite early success in improving conditions in the Great Lakes Basin, significant environmental challenges remain, including increased threats from invasive species and cleanup of areas contaminated with toxic substances that pose human health threats." (p. 11)

In 2001, there were nearly 600 beach closings as a result of e-coli bacteria, and state and local health authorities issued approximately 1,400 fish consumption advisories in the Great Lakes. In the years since the United States and Canada signed the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and agreed to give priority attention to the 43 designated Areas of Concern, the United States has not been able to remove any of the U.S. sites from the list of Areas of Concern. And, invasive species continue to establish themselves in the Great Lakes, and there are now more than 160 non-native species living in our Great Lakes.

Senator Levin and I have worked together as co-chairs of the Great Lakes Task Force since 2000.

We have fought to secure needed Great Lakes funding for the NOAA water level gauges, the replacement ice-breaking vessel, the Mackinaw, and sea lamprey control money for the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. We both met with the U.S. Trade Representative in an effort to prevent water from the Great Lakes from being diverted abroad. And, we also worked together to authorize the Great Lakes Basin Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Program in the 2002 Farm Bill. Last fall, we passed the Great Lakes Legacy Act, which provides up to \$50 million per year to the EPA to clean up contaminated sediments at Areas of Concern. The President provided \$15 million in his FY04 budget to get this program started.

These steps, in conjunction with the efforts by our states, are positive, but unfortunately -- based on the federal government's current level of funding -- we are not able to keep pace with the problems facing the Great Lakes. An April 2003 GAO report found that the federal government has spent about \$745 million over the last 10 years on Great Lakes restoration programs. Now, consider the fact that the GAO reported that the eight Great Lakes states spent \$956 million during that same 10-year period. Mr. President, the federal government is simply not spending enough to protect and improve the Great Lakes -- one-fifth of the world's freshwater.

When Senator Levin and I and the other members of the Great Lakes Task Force asked for a GAO study on restoration efforts in 2001, we knew some of the challenges facing the Great Lakes. Many of us were growing frustrated by the status quo of Great Lakes programs. We wanted to understand how management of the Great Lakes compared with the management of the Chesapeake Bay, the Everglades, San Francisco Bay and other large aquatic ecosystems.

Though GAO is scheduled to report on its findings shortly, I want to highlight a few key findings in its report. First, GAO found that both federal and state officials cited a lack of funding as the chief barrier to restoration progress. Second, there are several Great Lakes environmental restoration strategies, but they are not coordinated. Third, GAO was not able to provide a comprehensive assessment of the restoration progress in the Great Lakes based on the indicators and monitoring system.

Based on this information, Senator Levin and I, along with our colleagues -- Chairman Voinovich, Senator Durbin, Senator Coleman, Senator Stabenow, Senator Clinton, and Senator Schumer -- introduced the Great Lakes Environmental Restoration Act. This bill will build upon the efforts by the Great Lakes states, which have convened a Working Group to establish their Great Lakes goals and priorities. Many of our regional interest groups and agencies have prepared strategic plans and priorities. And, we have brought in the President's Council on Environmental Quality so that the President will better understand the value of a long-term plan for the Great Lakes. I can't emphasize how important it is to have all of these interests working toward the same goal.

A Great Lakes Restoration program must be an equal partnership between the local, state, and federal governments and other interested citizens and organizations. I believe that this legislation would provide the tools needed for the long-term future of the Great Lakes. First, this legislation would create a \$6 billion Great Lakes Restoration Grant Program to augment existing federal and state efforts to clean up, protect, and restore the Great Lakes. In the April 2003 GAO report, the GAO reported that insufficient funding is often cited as a limitation to restoration efforts. Therefore, an additional \$600 million in annual funding would be appropriated through the EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office, and the Program Office would provide grants to the Great Lakes states, municipalities, and other applicants in coordination with the Great Lakes Environmental Restoration Advisory Board. This funding would provide the extra resources that existing programs do not have.

While the Great Lakes are a national and international resource, I believe that the region, not the bureaucrats in Washington, needs to be setting its priorities and guiding the future efforts on the Lakes. This bill would require very close coordination between the EPA and the state and regional interests before grants are released. The Great Lakes Environmental Restoration Advisory Board, led by the Great Lakes governors, would include mayors, federal agencies, Native American tribes, environmentalists, industry representatives, and Canadian observers. This Advisory Board, which would include all of the interests in the Great Lakes, would provide priorities on restoration issues, such as invasive species control and prevention, wetlands restoration, contaminated sediments clean up, and water quality improvements. Additionally, this Advisory Board would provide recommendations on which grant applications to fund. Ultimately, the input from the Advisory Board would mean that the region would be involved in determining the long-term future of the Great Lakes.

As the April 2003 GAO study reported, environmental restoration activities in the Great Lakes are uncoordinated. So, the second goal of this legislation is the establishment of a Great Lakes federal Coordinating Council to coordinate federal activities in the Great Lakes. The EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office would serve as the Council leader, and participants would include the key federal agencies involved in Great Lakes work, such as NOAA, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Interior. The Council would meet at least three times per year to ensure that the efforts of federal agencies concerning environmental restoration and protection of the Great Lakes are coordinated, effective, complementary, and cost-efficient. The Council also would provide a list of its funding priorities to the Office of Management and Budget.

Finally, our bill would address the GAO's second recent finding that environmental indicators and a monitoring system for the Great Lakes need to be developed to measure progress on new and existing restoration programs.

Mr. Chairman, the Great Lakes Task Force and the efforts of other members have certainly impacted the Lakes for the better. I am very proud that I have secured over \$34 million for Ohio and the Great Lakes states for projects that have helped protect and restore the Lakes. I am proud to have sponsored the Great Lakes Legacy Act with Senator Levin, which will provide funds to the EPA to cleanup contaminated sediment at Areas of Concern, and I'm very pleased that the President included \$15 million in the Administration's fiscal year 2004 budget to initiate this program. Also, I believe that the National Invasive Species Council Act, which I am sponsoring, and the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act, which I am cosponsoring, will help reduce the number of new invasions of non-native species. But, these are efforts aimed at very specific problems in the Great Lakes. As the GAO noted, there is no over-arching plan to coordinate our efforts. I hope that the Congress is able to work with the states in order to coordinate a long-term vision for the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes are such a unique resource, that we must do all that we can to protect them for the future.

Thank you.