

Will Canada increase its commitments to the Great Lakes like the United States?

Fact Sheet

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Both Canada and the United States have fallen behind in their obligations to clean up the Great Lakes under the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement*.

Now, the United States has declared the Great Lakes a “national treasure” and bipartisan legislation has been introduced in both the United States Senate and House of Representatives to address criticism from the General Accounting Office of the U.S. Congress that Great Lakes programs lack coordination, a cohesive strategy and suffer from inadequate funding.



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Called the *Great Lakes Environmental Restoration Act* and the *Great Lakes Restoration Financing Act*, these bills would provide up to \$6 billion over 10 years for Great Lakes restoration. This program would be similar to programs already underway in the Florida Everglades and Chesapeake Bay. The bills provide for Canada, Ontario and Quebec to sit as observers on an Advisory Committee.

There is no active consideration of parallel efforts underway in Canada. Will Canada increase its commitments to the Great Lakes as the U.S. government is poised to do?

There is concern that these new bills could replace shared programs which have been set out between Canada and the U.S. in the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement*, an important international agreement in place since 1972.

Canada's current commitments to Great Lakes programs are paltry when compared to the budgets proposed for the U.S. Great Lakes Restoration Plan. In 2000, the Canadian Great Lakes Program provided an additional \$40 million over 4 years to implement action plans to restore contaminated areas of concern in the Great Lakes. Ontario, in 2002, promised \$50 million. Crucial Great Lakes programs were lost in 2003 when the federal government withdrew funding for the St. Lawrence River Action Plan shared with Quebec.

For years it has been established that the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River are one ecosystem and that shared program planning between Canada and the U.S. were crucial to the success of the progress of restoration and in meeting new challenges. An opportunity to re-establish this will come with the discussion on the pending renewal between Canada and the United States of the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement*.

What needs to be done?

- ✓ The Canadian federal and provincial governments need to substantially increase the resources allocated to protect and restore the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River ecosystem.
- ✓ Parallel plans for restoration need to be developed in Canada in consultation with stakeholders to ensure that our legislatures are keeping up with the U.S.
- ✓ Canada needs to reinforce with the U.S. that the Great Lakes is a shared resource and that program priorities need to be developed together.

The time is now for unprecedented cooperation among leaders in Ottawa, Toronto and Quebec City to plan together for an improved Great Lakes.

Great Lakes for the Future



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