



GREAT LAKES LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

Great Lakes News for Legislators

An online newsletter of the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus

Caucus Chair: Michigan Sen. Patricia Birkholz

March 2008

On Tap This Issue

- New Web site, upcoming events
- Backing for ballast rules
- Tracking state legislation
- Update on proposed compact
- Priorities for Congress
- Water levels rising
- Connecting Great Lakes, economy

Quick Links

Alliance for the Great Lakes www.greatlakes.org

Council of Great Lakes Governors www.cglg.org

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative www.glsclcities.org

Great Lakes Commission www.glc.org

Great Lakes Regional Collaboration www.epa.gov/greatlakes

Great Lakes United www.glu.org

Great Lakes WATER Institute www.glw.iuwm.edu

Healing Our Waters Coalition www.healingourwaters.org

International Association for Great Lakes Research www.iaglr.org

International Joint Commission www.ijc.org

Northeast Midwest Institute www.nemw.org/greatlakes.htm

The Joyce Foundation www.joycefdn.org

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem www.fws.gov/midwest/greatlakes

[Newsletter Archive and More on the Caucus](#)

Caucus unveils new Web site for legislators

The Great Lakes Legislative Caucus has launched its own Web site to better serve state lawmakers interested in issues related to Great Lakes protection and restoration.

Highlights of the site -- www.greatlakeslegislators.org -- include:

- links to the caucus's Great Lakes state and federal legislative trackers;
- maps of the Great Lakes basin's state and federal legislative districts, as well as a list of legislators representing the basin;
- a page devoted to information on upcoming caucus events and activities;
- a look at the latest news impacting the Great Lakes and the legislators who represent it; and
- a forum for caucus members to exchange ideas with one another (those interested in participating in the forum simply need to register on the site).

We hope you find this new resource of the caucus useful. If you have any ideas for the site, or comments on it, please contact Tim Anderson at 630/925-1922 or tanderson@csg.org.

Upcoming caucus events

We also hope you plan on taking part in three upcoming Great Lakes Legislative Caucus events.

On June 13 and 14, the caucus will hold a meeting in Chicago. The two-day event will give legislators the chance to work together and to learn more about key Great Lakes-related environmental issues and trends. Travel scholarships will be available for legislators.

On April 25, from 11 a.m.-noon EST, the caucus will hold a regional teleconference focusing on Great Lakes water quality and pollution prevention. On May 19, from 2:30-3:30 p.m. EST, a call will be held on the future of the region's economy, and the role that Great Lakes restoration can play in strengthening it. Legislators, legislative staff and interested others are encouraged to take part in these calls.

Registration information will be distributed soon and will be available on the Web site. For more information, please contact Mike McCabe (mmccabe@csg.org) or Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org). We also can be reached at 630/925-1922.

State AGs put legal weight behind new ballast water rules

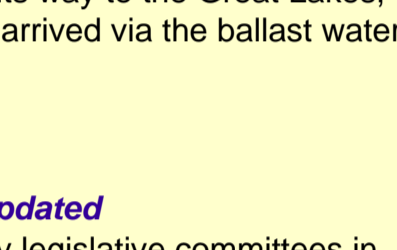
Six Great Lakes state attorneys general have filed an [amicus brief](#) defending the right of states to protect their natural resources from aquatic invasive species.

The brief specifically voices support of Michigan regulations for ocean-going ships. The rules, based on a 2005 law, are the focus of a federal lawsuit now being heard by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. A U.S. district court judge ruled in favor of the Michigan law last year.

Legislation has been introduced in all of the seven other Great Lakes states to follow Michigan's lead on ballast water regulations.

In addition, state regulators in Minnesota and Wisconsin are considering the adoption of statewide ballast water rules. [According to a March 26 Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune article](#), Duluth-Superior Harbor was the top location in the Great Lakes in 2005 for ballast water discharges. A March 3 editorial in the [Sheboygan Press](#) voices support for Wisconsin implementing its own rules.

This year marks the **20th anniversary** of the initial discovery of an especially notorious aquatic invader: the zebra mussel, which has wreaked ecological and economic havoc since entering and spreading through the ecosystem.

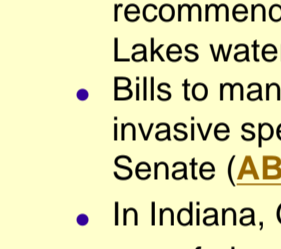


Fight against VHS continues

One invasive virus that has gotten the attention of Great Lakes policymakers in recent years is viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS).

VHS has caused widespread fish kills in the ecosystem, and states have responded to the threat by implementing new rules on fishing and interstate shipments. This month, the National Park Service unveiled a new [VHS prevention and response plan](#) designed to keep the virus out of Lake Superior.

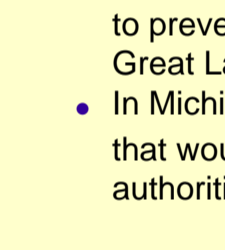
Also in March, legislation was introduced in Minnesota ([HF 3550/SF 3576](#)) to prevent VHS from spreading to inland waters. Under the bill, testing for the fatal fish virus would be required in some bait fish and game fish used to stock lakes, the Minneapolis-St. Paul [Star Tribune](#) reports.



It is not known how VHS made its way to the Great Lakes, scientists say, but it could have arrived via the ballast water of ocean-going vessels.

State, federal Great Lakes legislative trackers updated

Minnesota's VHS legislation -- which was passed by legislative committees in March -- is one of numerous Great Lakes- and water-related bills being tracked by the caucus.



If you have legislation to add to our [state and federal legislative trackers](#), please contact Tim Anderson at 630/925-1922 or tanderson@csg.org.

Your comments, feedback and research assistance are greatly appreciated. Over the past month, legislative movement has included the following:

- Two Great Lakes bills were passed by an Illinois House committee. [HB 5256](#) calls on the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to work with other states on a notification policy regarding the permitting of new sources of water pollution or increased levels of pollution into Lake Michigan. [HB 5310](#) would create the Task Force on Conservation and Quality of the Great Lakes. This group would annually make legislative recommendations to the General Assembly on how to protect Great Lakes water quality and supply.
- Bills to manage ballast water and prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species were introduced in the New York Assembly and Senate ([AB 10099](#), [AB 10212](#), [AB 10349](#) and [SB 7113](#)).
- In Indiana, Gov. Mitch Daniels signed legislation ([HB 1120](#)) to limit the use of phosphorus in dishwasher detergents. [The goal of the bill](#) is to reduce water pollution and algae growth (which can create so-called "dead zones" in waterways).
- New York [Assembly Bill 9462](#) was signed into law. It clarifies the responsibilities of the newly created [New York Invasive Species Council](#), which has been charged with implementing specific initiatives to prevent the spread of invasive plants and animals, including in the Great Lakes.
- In Michigan, both legislative chambers have passed [SB 47](#), a proposal that would allow municipalities to establish tax increment finance authorities for the purpose of improving water resources.

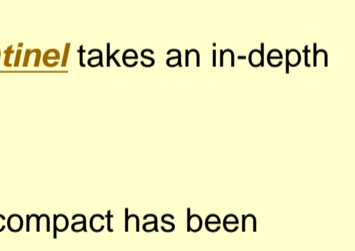
New York becomes fourth state to OK compact

Half of the eight states needed to approve the [Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact](#) are now on board.

New York's compact legislation ([SB 4324](#)) was signed into law in March. Two legislators who pushed for the bill's passage hailed the signing as a watershed moment in the state's environmental protection efforts.

New York Sen. George Maziarz said the interstate agreement "is critical to protecting our precious freshwater resources."

Robert Sweeney, chair of the New York Assembly's Environmental Conservation Committee, added that millions of people in his state rely on the Great Lakes ecosystem not only as a source of drinking water, but as a source of electric power.



"Over 40 percent of our state lies within the Great Lakes basin," he said in noting the importance of conserving the water resource through the compact.

Click [here](#) for the governor's press release.

The other half of Great Lakes states

New York joined Indiana in ratifying the interstate agreement this year. Minnesota and Illinois passed compact legislation in 2007.

But whether compact bills eventually make it through the region's four other state legislatures remains to be seen.

In limbo in Wisconsin

In Wisconsin, lawmakers adjourned in March without agreement on compact legislation. [SB 523](#), which also would put in place new state-specific rules on water use and management, passed the Senate but stalled in the Assembly. Gov. Jim Doyle has said he would be willing to call a special session to get the agreement enacted into state law.

Concerns in Wisconsin have centered on 1) the ability of some communities in Wisconsin in the future to tap into Great Lakes water and 2) a provision in the compact that would require certain water diversion proposals to be approved by all of the Great Lakes governors.

This [March 23 article in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) takes an in-depth look at the compact debate in Wisconsin.

Alternative bill in Ohio

In Ohio, a proposal to adopt a different version of the compact has been introduced in the state Senate.

The measure, [SB 291](#), reflects concerns some lawmakers have expressed about the bill's impact on private-property rights. It also would change how Great Lakes governors approve certain diversion proposals (from unanimous approval to a simple majority).

The Ohio House has approved a compact bill ([HB 416](#)) with language that matches the legislation already passed in Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana and New York.

Click [here](#) to read a recent article on Ohio legislative activity related to the compact.

Discussions ongoing in Michigan

In Michigan, lawmakers are still trying to work out differences in the implementing language that would accompany the compact.

The interstate agreement itself enjoys widespread support, but different state-specific rules on water management and use have been proposed in the Republican-led Senate and Democrat-controlled House.

Below are articles and other resources related to Michigan discussions about the compact and the complementary water bills under discussion.

[Information on Michigan Senate legislative package](#)

[Information on Michigan House legislative package](#)

[March 22 article in The Daily Mining Gazette](#)

[March 25 Associated Press story](#)

Movement in Pennsylvania in early '08

In late January, the Pennsylvania House overwhelmingly approved compact legislation. [HB 1705](#) is now under consideration in the state Senate.

Drugs in drinking water and lakes

Recent reports of prescription drugs being found in the nation's [drinking water supplies](#) and in [Lake Michigan](#) have policymakers searching for ways to better dispose of pharmaceuticals.

In Wisconsin, the [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) reports, more counties are properly discarded. [Illinois officials announced in March](#) that they would increase water-quality monitoring to determine levels of pharmaceuticals in state waterways. In [Pennsylvania](#), an advanced-testing program is continuing, with the state now analyzing the level of pharmaceuticals, antibiotics and hormones near public water supply intakes.

Water levels on the rise

While still below normal level, water levels on Lake Superior are higher than they were at this time last year thanks to a colder winter, the [Minnesota News Network](#) reports. Levels on Lake Superior were at record lows in August and September of 2007.

[The Detroit Free Press](#) reports that the region's higher snow levels during the winter months are expected to raise water levels this year by as much as a foot in the upper Great Lakes.

"Vital connections" in Great Lakes region focus of new study

The scheduled presenter for the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus' second teleconference call (see story above on upcoming caucus events), John Austin of the Brookings Institution, has just released a [new study on the region titled "The Vital Connection."](#)

The report focuses on the economic and environmental challenges faced by Great Lakes states and provinces, and lays out a strategy for how this region can prosper in a global economy and preserve its natural resources. Austin's policy ideas include:

- establishing a bi-national innovation fund that targets investments and research in next-generation energy technologies, the science of the Great Lakes, and economic sectors such as advanced manufacturing and medical health;
- enhancing and marketing the "Freshwater Coast" with a deeper investment in Great Lakes restoration and the establishment of a new Great Lakes Coastal Development Authority;
- improving the movement of goods and people along the U.S.-Canada border;
- creating a common market in the Great Lakes region for human capital and commerce; and
- setting and meeting renewable energy standards and carbon-reduction goals.



About the Newsletter and the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus
Great Lakes News for Legislators is an online publication of the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus (GLLC). The GLLC is a nonpartisan group of state and provincial lawmakers from eight states (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Wisconsin) and two provinces (Ontario and Québec). The goal of the caucus is to facilitate the regional exchange of ideas and information on key Great Lakes issues, strengthen the role of state and provincial legislators in the policymaking process, and promote the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes. All legislators are welcome to participate. Funding for the caucus is provided by the Joyce Foundation. The Council of State Governments provides staffing services for the caucus. More information is available at www.greatlakeslegislators.org.

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