



GREAT LAKES LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

Great Lakes News for Legislators

March 2011

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About the Caucus



The Great Lakes Legislative Caucus is a nonpartisan group of state and provincial lawmakers from eight U.S. states (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Wisconsin) and two Canadian provinces (Ontario and Quebec).

Minnesota Sen. Ann Rest serves as chair of the caucus.

The Midwestern Office of The Council of State Governments provides staffing services for the caucus. Funding for the caucus is provided by The Joyce Foundation.

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With funding support from the Joyce Foundation, The Midwestern Office of The Council of State Governments provides staffing services for the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus.

More information on CSG Midwest is available at www.csamidwest.org or by calling 630.925.1922.

CSG Midwest is one of four regional offices of [The Council of State Governments](#), a national nonpartisan, nonprofit association of state elected officials.

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New bills introduced to protect Great Lakes: Stopping spread of invasive species, preventing pollution focus of state and federal legislation

New bills to prevent Asian carp and municipal sewage from entering the Great Lakes have been introduced this year in the U.S. Congress, while at the state level, measures related to offshore wind energy, better controlling invasive species and strengthening wetlands protection are all being considered.

[Click here for a synopsis of the legislation, along with links to information about the proposals »](#)

The full list of bills being tracked by the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus is available through [our state legislative tracker](#) and [our federal legislative tracker](#). To add a bill to the list, please contact [Tim Anderson](#).

Future funding levels for Great Lakes Restoration Initiative still in doubt

One of the many budget battles being waged in Washington, D.C., right now involves future funding levels for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The historic federal commitment to cleaning up the Great Lakes was signed into law two years ago - with a funding level in FY 2010 of \$475 million. For [FY 2012](#), Obama wants to allocate \$350 million.

The amounts for FY 2011 and 2012 remain in doubt. Obama's proposed spending level for the current fiscal year is \$300 million; House Republicans have [proposed cutting appropriations](#) for the initiative to \$225 million. A deal on the final budget for the current fiscal year, which began Oct. 1, 2010, has not yet been reached.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative provides grants to projects (including those administered by the states themselves) that aim to control invasive species, curb non-point source pollution and remove contaminated sediment. [The map on this page](#) provides details on the types of projects being funded across the basin.

[Healing Our Waters Coalition analysis of cuts to the initiative and the Clean Water State Revolving Fund »](#)

Water shortages in Great Lakes region? New study says scarcity is possible in certain local areas

Even in the Great Lakes, home to the largest freshwater system in the world and where groundwater resources abound, future water shortages are possible, according to [a report](#) done earlier this year by the U.S. Geological Survey. The study's lead author, Howard Reeves, singles out the decline of groundwater levels in the Chicago and Milwaukee areas: Local groundwater levels in this part of the basin have declined by as much as 1,000 feet and are estimated to decline an additional 100 feet by 2040.

"While there is an abundance of water in the region, we may see local shortages or conflicts because water is not distributed evenly," Reeves says. "In some areas, the physical quantity of water may be limiting."

Whether or not there are future local shortages will depend in part on the choices made by water users and decision-makers, he says.

[Major findings of report »](#)

[Great Lakes Alliance press release on findings »](#)

New study on Great Lakes water quality raises concern about rise in algal blooms

As the U.S. and Canadian governments work toward a revision of the 39-year-old [Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement](#), the International Joint Commission has laid out a [list of 32 recommendations](#) on how the state, provincial and federal governments can better protect the Great Lakes.

The binational body's 15th biennial report on the state of the Great Lakes was released in February.

The commission focuses largely on the importance of improving the near-shore health of the lakes, and it raises particular concern about the rise in algal blooms, which create "[dead zones](#)" in the lakes and are potentially harmful to human health. This aquatic plant growth is caused by the presence of excessive nutrients such as phosphorus in the lakes. These nutrients reach the lakes due to agricultural and urban runoff, among other factors. Higher water temperatures also contribute to algal blooms.

The study recommends a science-based approach to addressing the re-emergence of algal blooms. It also lays out steps for improving binational cooperation on preventing the introduction and spread of non-native aquatic species and for improving beach health and monitoring.

Plan to ship radioactive waste through Great Lakes gets OK from Canadian regulatory agency

A plan to ship radioactive waste through the Great Lakes has received a flurry of criticism over the past year, but in February, it secured the approval of a key federal regulatory commission in Canada.

In issuing the transport license and certificate to Bruce Power, a private nuclear-generating company, the [Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission](#) said the proposed shipment of 16 steam generators containing radioactive materials can be completed safely and that the risk to people and the environment is negligible.

Others aren't so sure.

According to the [Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative](#), a bi-national coalition of more than 70 mayors from the region, the Bruce Power proposal would set a regrettable precedent for what kind of shipments are allowed in the Great Lakes system.

The region's mayors say the plan calls for the transport of 1,600 tons of radioactive equipment and waste - a figure that exceeds the International Atomic Energy Agency's safety standard for inland waters. They add that an accidental spill in certain parts of the Great Lakes could exceed federal standards for radioactivity in drinking water.

Approval of such a shipment requires approval from the U.S. government as well. In October 2010, seven U.S. senators from the Great Lakes region [wrote a letter](#) to the U.S. Department of Transportation expressing their concerns about the Bruce Power proposal. The DOT's Pipelines and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) is the regulatory body that makes decisions on the transportation of hazardous materials.

In its [letter back to the senators](#), the federal agency noted that it has previously authorized the domestic shipment of more than 80 components removed from service from U.S. nuclear plants. "Many of these components were significantly larger and heavier than the Bruce Power steam generators," PHMSA Administrator Cynthia Quarterman said in the letter.

She added that "radioactive material shipments are transported routinely in U.S. waters," including a shipment on Lake Michigan from a nuclear power plant in northern Wisconsin to Tennessee. Bruce Power wants to send the steam generators to Sweden for recycling and to reduce their volume.