



GREAT LAKES LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

Great Lakes News for Legislators

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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).

Sen. Patricia Birkholz of Michigan 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.

Great Lakes Links

- [Alliance for the Great Lakes](#)
- [Council of Great Lakes Governors](#)
- [Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative](#)
- [Great Lakes Blogger](#)
- [Great Lakes Commission](#)
- [Great Lakes Environmental Law Center](#)
- [Great Lakes Echo](#)
- [Great Lakes Information Network](#)
- [Great Lakes Regional Collaboration](#)
- [Great Lakes Restoration Initiative](#)
- [Great Lakes United](#)
- [Great Lakes WATER Institute](#)
- [Healing Our Waters Coalition](#)
- [International Joint Commission](#)
- [Northeast-Midwest Institute](#)
- [The Joyce Foundation](#)



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.csghmidwest.org or by calling 630/925-1922.

CSG Midwest is one of four regional offices of The Council of State Governments (www.csg.org) -- a national nonpartisan, nonprofit association of state elected officials.

Contacts

Tim Anderson
CSG Midwest
tanderson@csg.org

Mike McCabe
CSG Midwest
mmccabe@csg.org

Lawmakers encouraged to register for December caucus meeting in Chicago

State and provincial legislators from across the Great Lakes basin are invited to attend the upcoming meeting of the [Great Lakes Legislative Caucus](#).

The nonpartisan group will meet Dec. 11 and 12 in Chicago. Travel and lodging reimbursement is available on a first-come, first-served basis; for details, see this [invitation letter](#) that was sent to lawmakers who represent districts in the Great Lakes basin. [Here is the registration form](#).

At the meeting, attendees will explore issues such as the new federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, state implementation of the new Great Lakes compact, ballast water regulation, off-shore wind energy and water conservation. They also will have the chance to explore how states and provinces -- and the region as a whole -- can better protect and restore the Great Lakes. For more information, contact Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org) or Mike McCabe (mmccabe@csg.org) at 630-925-1922.

New \$475 million initiative a major federal funding victory, but policy challenges remain

During the past fiscal year, the federal government spent \$500 million on the Great Lakes through various programs and agencies.

With a single initiative, signed into law in early November, U.S. lawmakers committed to doubling spending in FY 2010 on efforts to protect and restore the largest fresh surface-water system in the world.

The [\\$475 million Great Lakes Restoration Initiative](#) culminates years of work by the region's leaders in trying to develop a uniform Great Lakes protection strategy and then secure the federal funding for it.

According to Jennifer Hill of the National Wildlife Federation's Great Lakes Regional Center, roughly half of the \$475 million will go to various federal agencies; the other half will be open to requests for proposals from states, nongovernmental organizations and others.

There is no specific earmark in the federal legislation for states; however, they are expected to apply for and receive federal grants to pursue their own Great Lakes priorities.

In unveiling the initiative earlier this year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency broke down how it expects the federal dollars to be spent. As the accompanying chart shows, the single biggest piece of the pie will go to

accelerating clean-up of so-called "Areas of Concern" inside the basin.

New programs will also be created to help stop pesticides, pollutants and pharmaceuticals from entering the lakes.

Money will go to many other areas as well. Examples include:

* advancing ballast water treatment technology;

* improving Great Lakes beach monitoring and targeting the sources of pollution that lead to beach closings; and

* protecting Great Lakes habitat and wetlands. (Hill notes, for example, that some of the federal funds will be used for land purchases or conservation easements.)

Though President Obama has said the FY 2010 funding is part of a larger five-year plan for the Great Lakes, nothing is guaranteed beyond FY 2010. The region's leaders will have to fight for federal dollars once again next year.

But Tim Eder, executive director of the Great Lakes Commission, also warns that money alone won't protect the Great Lakes. It won't, for example, prevent invasive species from entering the Great Lakes via the ballast water of ocean-going vessels.

"We have to make sure sound policies are in place as well," he says.

Asian carp knocking on Great Lakes' door, and could be one flood away from entering

A group of Great Lakes conservation groups is calling for "immediate emergency action" to be taken in order to prevent Asian carp from entering the basin.

Currently, an electric fish barrier on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal is being used to keep the carp from entering Lake Michigan.

However, the concern is that a flooding of the nearby Des Plaines River (where carp have been found) would allow the aquatic invader to bypass the electric barrier and enter the Great Lakes system.

The nearby I&M Canal could also serve as a route for Asian carp to enter the Great Lakes.

The conservation groups are urging the Army Corps of Engineers to build a set of new barriers. [Here is their proposal](#).

"We are just one heavy rain away from this emergency becoming an epidemic," says Joel Brammeier, acting president and CEO of the [Alliance for the Great Lakes](#).

[Asian carp](#) already have wreaked havoc in parts of the Mississippi River since being released from fish farms in the South. If the aquatic invader enters the Great Lakes system, it would pose a serious threat to native fish populations.

As part of federal legislation signed into law in October, the Army Corps of Engineers has been given the authority to take "emergency measures," if necessary, "to prevent aquatic nuisance species from bypassing the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal Dispersal Barrier Project." Here is a related story from the [Associated Press](#), as well as a [press release](#) from Illinois U.S. Rep. Judy Biggert.

[Here is a recent Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article](#) that discusses concerns about maintenance of the existing Asian carp barrier on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, as well as a [Chicago Tribune article](#) explaining plans to "poison" part of the canal in order to stop Asian carp.

Implementation of Great Lakes compact far from a done deal, report says

How are states progressing with implementation of the historic [Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact](#)?

In October, the [National Wildlife Federation issued a progress report](#) to mark the one-year anniversary of the compact being enacted by the eight Great Lakes states and the federal government. (The provinces of Ontario and Quebec have passed a companion regional agreement.)

New water conservation laws and policies, more funding, and additional water-management programs are still needed to fully implement the compact, the NWF says. According to the progress report, jurisdictions vary in what they still need to meet their obligations:

"Indiana, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin have passed basic implementation laws to fulfill the Great Lakes Compact, but still need additional regulations. Minnesota and Illinois, relying on existing laws, need to review those laws and amend them to ensure strong implementation. However, Ohio and New York still need to pass legislation to implement the full requirements of the Compact. Ontario and Quebec each have passed the Regional Agreement and still need to implement provincial requirements."

We will review state progress in implementing the compact at the December meeting of the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus. Here is more information on the work of the [Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Council](#) - the regional body created with passage of the compact.

Around the Region: Wisconsin, Ontario and Michigan

* Wisconsin lawmakers passed two bills in October designed to protect the state's water resources.

[SB 123](#), sponsored by [Sen. Bob Jauch](#) and modeled after an existing law in Minnesota, strengthens statewide enforcement of restrictions on the transportation of aquatic invasive species. The bill gives the Department of Natural Resources more authority to remove aquatic animals and plants from watercraft.

[AB 281](#), signed into law in November, places new limits on the use of phosphorus in dishwater detergents. As the bill's sponsor, Rep. Spencer Black, [notes in this press release](#) on the bill, phosphorus can harm lakes and streams by "encouraging excess weed and algae growth." Earlier this year, a measure ([AB 3](#)) to restrict the use of phosphorus in lawn fertilizer was signed into law in Wisconsin.

Links to numerous state and provincial bills related to the Great Lakes and water protection are available through our [legislative tracker](#).

* Ontario has been inundated with off-shore wind energy proposals - so much so that the province has stopped accepting new applications, the [Toronto Star](#) reports. One reason for the interest is a unique tax incentive for off-shore development. According to the [Star](#), a new "feed-in" tariff in Ontario provides off-shore developers with 19 cents per-kilowatt-hour of electricity generated.

* A last-minute legislative agreement has saved -- at least for the next three years -- a state-level wetlands protection program in Michigan. As part of a budget-cutting move, Gov. Jennifer Granholm had proposed eliminating the program and handing wetlands protection over to the federal government. Michigan is one of only two U.S. states that administers the federal government's wetlands permit program under the Clean Water Act. (Other Great Lakes states have separate permitting systems for certain types of wetlands.) Conservation groups said eliminating the state-level program would put hundreds of thousands of acres at risk. [According to this mlive.com article](#), several changes to the existing program had to be made in order to get the support of business groups. [Michigan Rep. Rebekah Warren](#) and [Sen. Patricia Birkholz](#) led legislative negotiations to save the wetlands program.

Great Lakes ships get exemption from clean-air rule

A new EPA rule on air pollution will not apply to certain Great Lakes ships as the result of a deal brokered by members of Congress.

[Those members argued](#) that requiring old freighters to use low-sulfur diesel fuel would have devastated the Great Lakes shipping industry and hurt the region's already struggling economy. Great Lakes steamships will be exempt from the rules, and other freighters will be able to apply for a waiver from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The goal of the new EPA rule, the [New York Times](#) reports, is to curb the environmental and health problems caused by the use of "dirty diesel fuel." The regulations apply to ships using coastal and inland waters. According to [Great Lakes United](#), high sulfur and particulate emissions from commercial vessels affect the health of people who live near ports and coastlines.

