

Testimony by The Honorable Bob Taft
Governor, State of Ohio
on behalf of the
Council of Great Lakes Governors
before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

March 16, 2006

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

The Great Lakes community has reached an amazing milestone. Fifteen hundred people representing states, cities, tribes, the federal government, environmental, business and agricultural organizations came together in an unprecedented effort to create the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy, a blueprint for action to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

Now that planning is complete, it is time to act. But there are barriers to implementation, and we need your help to surmount them. While the Collaboration members are moving forward on a number of actions using existing resources, significant policy and funding impediments remain. Without your support in this critical first year, there is a danger that the plan will be for naught and our momentum will be undermined.

That would be tragic, because the Great Lakes remain threatened by emerging environmental threats, such as the introduction of a new invasive species every eight months, and by historical problems such as contaminated sediments. A lack of sufficient coordination and focus among existing programs is also hindering progress.

Congress can help:

- By tackling problems that must be addressed on a regional or national level – such as the control of invasive species;
- By modifying the way funds are directed to Great Lakes priorities to improve coordination; and
- By appropriating funds to address the most pressing environmental needs as part of the current budget.

Let me briefly address each of the areas in which we seek your assistance.

Invasive species pose perhaps the greatest threat to the Great Lakes in a generation. We urge you to pass the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act.

In some areas, most notably wetlands restoration, a multiplicity of federal programs with differing requirements complicates effective use of resources. In the Great Lakes Environmental Restoration Act (S 508), Senators Levin and DeWine have identified a promising mechanism for directing funds toward priority needs. By funding priorities rather than programs, Congress can effectively channel the work of federal, state and local agencies toward key objectives.

We applaud all the bill's sponsors and join their call for long-term, large scale funding through a reformed process. But this will take time. That is why we ask that you fund key actions in this budget.

We particularly ask for your support of the following:

- Fund completion and operation of two permanent dispersal barriers in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal to keep the Asian carp out of the Great Lakes. It will cost \$6 million to protect the Great Lakes fishery, a small fraction of its \$4 billion economic value.

- Support the President's request for the Great Lakes Legacy Act to be funded at \$49.6 million— if not the full \$54 million authorized level. In Ohio, we are thrilled by the U.S. EPA decision to use funds from the Legacy Act to clean up contaminated sediments in the Ashtabula River. Similar success stories in other Great Lakes states can be realized if Congress agrees to the President's request.
- Provide an additional \$50 million to US EPA's brownfield program to clean up abandoned industrial waterfront properties in the Great Lakes basin. The economic return in our coastal cities can be tremendous. For example, a \$3 million Clean Ohio Fund grant at an abandoned manufacturing site in Sandusky is generating \$37 million in private investment in housing, retail, and outdoor recreational access.
- Finally, support the President's commitment to restore 200,000 acres of wetlands in the Great Lakes basin by appropriating \$28.5 million. To ensure these resources are used efficiently, we also ask that you join us in encouraging the Federal Interagency Task Force to consolidate many federal wetland programs.

These first steps in implementing the Strategy will help fulfill our moral obligation to preserve this natural treasure for future generations. Another reason we must act is that the Great Lakes are vital to the economic health of the nation. Nearly 29% of our nation's gross domestic product is produced by the Great Lakes States, including approximately 60% of all U.S. manufacturing. Shipping and tourism also produce significant economic activity, as others will testify here today.

One problem in particular illustrates the link between environmental restoration and economic viability. As Senator Voinovich knows, the Army Corps of Engineers annually dredges Toledo Harbor to maintain navigation. Sediments

have been disposed in the shallow western basin, stressing the most productive fishery in the entire Great Lakes.

We reached agreement with the Corps to cut back on open lake disposal and eliminate it entirely by 2012, using the dredged material for a habitat restoration project. Ohio will provide the non-federal match and together, we will turn a negative into a positive. This can be a striking example of collaborative success.

However, the agreement is seriously imperiled because the feasibility study did not qualify for funds under Section 204 of the Water Development Appropriations Act in federal fiscal year 2006. The Corps needs \$1.2 million for this study. I ask that you specifically name this project in the 2007 appropriations bill.

The lack of priority funding for this study parallels the lack of funds allocated to the dispersal barrier I mentioned moments ago. Projects like these are key in our attempts to protect and improve the Great Lakes, require a small investment relative to the damage they promise to prevent, and need to be given serious consideration at the federal level.

The matter is made more urgent by the fact that across Lake Erie, an average of four years of disposal capacity remains for navigation channel dredging. This looming crisis will force us to choose between dredging to support shipping, and open lake dumping to the detriment of the Lake and its fishing and boating industries.

The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration is needed to address emerging problems such as this, to oversee implementation of its Strategy, and to continue its collaborative work on behalf of Great Lakes restoration. We would welcome Congressional action to codify both the Collaboration and the Federal Interagency Task Force.

Collaboration members are actively working to identify areas in which all levels of government can coordinate efforts toward clearly defined goals. While I have spoken today of how Congress can help, be assured that the Great Lakes States and the other stakeholders remain committed to doing our share to protect and preserve our greatest natural resource.