



Protecting the Waters of the Great Lakes: Commenting on the “Annex” Reform Proposals 2005 drafts

The Great Lakes hold nearly 20 percent of the world’s available fresh surface water, and 95 percent of the fresh surface water in the United States. The lakes and their tributaries provide drinking water for 40 million people in the region. Yet, while the Great Lakes are vast, less than 1 percent of their water is renewed annually, making the lakes fragile and vulnerable to depletion. Eight states—Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, New York, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania—and two Canadian provinces—Ontario and Québec—share the Great Lakes. The ten jurisdictions have a long history of partially fulfilled handshake agreements on water with lofty goals of joint management and conservation.

But the growing threat of harmful exports and diversions of water out of the Great Lakes Basin, and, to some degree, overuse and mismanagement of water within the Basin, have spurred the states and provinces to action. After an expensive 1999 study of current laws and policies to protect the lakes revealed significant weaknesses, the basin governors and premiers signed an agreement-in-principle, commonly known as Annex 2001, to change the way we do business in the Great Lakes when it comes to water. The jurisdictions agreed to manage all basin water, including basin stream and groundwater, according to three principles:

1. Preventing or minimizing water loss through “return flow” and “environmentally sound and economically feasible” water conservation
2. Preventing harm to the quantity or quality of the water or the living things that depend on it, both by individual water taking projects and cumulatively over time
3. “Improving” the waters and the ecosystem when we take water from the basin lakes, streams, or ground

After releasing initial draft agreements for public comment last year, the governors and premiers reworked the agreements to reflect public opinion and are now releasing second versions of the agreements—a “compact” between the eight states that would be approved by Congress and be enforceable in U.S. federal court, and a non-binding, good-faith agreement between the eight states and two provinces that would provide consistency across the Canada-U.S. border. Together, the two agreements would jointly manage diversions and large water uses and create uniform standards to manage all water withdrawals.

The states and provinces are asking for public comment on their efforts through August 29, 2005.

Now is the time for concerned citizens of the Great Lakes basin to voice our concerns. Do the agreements cover all the potential threats to the lake? Are they strong enough?

Some important issues are detailed on the reverse. You can comment to your individual state or provincial government. Connect to www.greatlakesforever.org for hearing dates and addresses for sending comment.

Any state or provincial citizen can also send a comment letter to Executive Director David Naftzger of the Council of Great Lakes Governors at annex2001@cglg.org or at 35 E. Wacker Dr. #1850, Chicago, Illinois, 60601. You can also provide written comments on a public Web bulletin board at www.cglg.org.

For hearing dates, fact sheets, commentary, and more, connect to www.greatlakesforever.org.