

## THE GREAT LAKES - ST. LAWRENCE: A VISION FOR TOMORROW

### A Changing Economic and Environmental Context

- No region exemplifies the dramatic transition which has taken place in the North American economy over the last decades as clearly as the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence bio-region. Economic dependence on bulk manufacturing and resource extraction has given way to an increasingly vast network of smaller, adaptable, and specialized firms, using highly skilled labour to produce value-added goods and services. The service sector has grown considerably, and now accounts for most of the employment in Ontario and Quebec, and in several of the Great Lakes states.
- As this economic transformation was taking place, a wave of environmental awareness was sweeping over the industrialized world, making itself strongly felt in the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence bio-region. Citizens at the grass roots, especially young citizens, decided they were no longer prepared to accept the deterioration of our natural heritage and resources caused by unbridled pollution, and they demanded prompt, strong action from their governments and other decision-leaders. An increasingly vocal, committed network of environmental advocates sprang up, and became an essential part of our socio-political, and economic reality.
- In the middle '80s, the realization emerged between economic and environmental forces that an integration of their interests must take place. "Our Common Future", the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, gave an added thrust to the necessity of integrating economy and environment for the common good and long-term preservation of the planet.
- It would be naive to believe that everyone has fully endorsed the concept of sustainable development, that is, the integration of environmental considerations and planning within economic development plans and operations. However, there are encouraging trends pointing to positive change. Several business and industrial leaders have endorsed the objective of sustainable development, both within their corporate framework and through more broadly based initiatives sponsored by business and industrial associations, or other representative groups or projects. Encouraging examples, among several, are the "New Directions" initiative by a group of Canadian industrial and environmental leaders to support the concept of "sunsetting" certain toxics; and the National Reduction Master Plan of the Canadian Chemical Producers' Association (CCPA), to include mandatory emission reporting for its members ahead of the National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) deadlines, due to start in 1994.
- These efforts are still few and scattered. Business and industrial leaders intent on implementing sustainable development practices must be encouraged to achieve them. The federal government has a key leadership role to play as credible policy-

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maker, objective and decisive regulator, catalyst for partnership and action, and supporter where necessary through appropriate incentives and inducements.

### The Great Lakes - St. Lawrence: the Environmental Context

- The March 1993 Draft Final Report of the International Joint Commission's (IJC) Great Lakes Virtual Elimination Task Force, and the 1991 report of the Great Lakes Water Quality Board, point out that the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence ecosystem cannot absorb any further infusion of persistent toxic substances.
- Both reports underline that significant, indeed impressive, results have been obtained over the last twenty years in reducing certain types of pollution. Well over 1,000 sewage treatment plants have been built or upgraded since 1970, and phosphorus discharges have dropped by 85 percent in many areas. Lake Erie, once choking to death with algae, is coming back to life and attracting fish once again.
- However, the reports also refer to the 362 contaminants still active in the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence ecosystem, 126 of which can have acute or chronic toxic effects on living species. Eleven have been judged by the Water Quality Board as critical pollutants, such as PCBs, DDT, mirex, mercury, benzopyrene, and lead. The Virtual Elimination Task Force has recommended that at least the 11 critical toxic substances be "sunsetting", that is, be subject to planned phasing out by a foreseeable deadline date; restricted, phased out, and finally banned.
- In 1990, the U.S. Congress ordered the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to prepare a clean-up plan for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence. In that same year, the US General Accounting Office reported that industries dumped 7 million gallons of oil, 89,000 lbs. of lead, 1,900 lbs. of PCBs, and 1,000 lbs of mercury into the Great Lakes! The EPA plan, released in 1993, proposes stringent regulations for 40 toxic pollutants. The clean-up timetable will be set following public hearings, and the Great Lakes states will have two years to bring their water quality standards in line with those of the EPA. Valdas Adamkus, the Great Lakes Region Administrator of the EPA, told media at the Montreal conference of Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Mayors in May 1993 that he deplored the lack of resolve he found at the official Canadian level in the joint environmental battle to save the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence ecosystem.

### The Great Lakes - St. Lawrence: the Need for Bilateral Action

- Because the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence bio-region is shared between Canada and the United States, the key to successfully dealing with its significant environmental problems lies in well-coordinated bilateral strategies. The IJC's Virtual Elimination Task Force talks of the imperative of an effective bilateral approach, and deplores the absence of a bilateral toxics management strategy. It recommends, among other

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things, coordinating the forthcoming Canadian National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) with the existing Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) of the U.S.A. to make them compatible in their objectives and scope. It also recommends a Great Lakes Clean Industries Initiative involving a coordinated industrial strategy at the bilateral level based on cleaner production processes, including transition and labour issues.

- An initiative of Great Lakes Governors, led by Governor Voinovich of Ohio, proposes a "Great Lakes Tomorrow" or "Great Lakes Competitiveness Study" for the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence bio-region. Building from the firm premises of environmental/economic integration and the concept of sustainable development, it entails a broadly based bio-regional community project to establish a vision and plan for the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence region of tomorrow, and a coordinated, innovative, environmentally-sound transition.

### The Great Lakes - St. Lawrence: the Liberal Commitment

- A Liberal government commits itself to firm and pro-active policies regarding the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence ecosystem.
  1. We consider the ecosystem a priority region, where one-third of the Canadian population lives, and where the great bulk of Canada's fresh water resources are located. Environment Canada's policies, and their level and quality of human resources, will reflect this priority.
  2. We will take decisive action to initiate and supplement measures towards the clean-up and environmental restoration of the bio-region. To this end, we undertake the following:
    - a) to reaffirm the leadership of the International Joint Commission in the effort to reduce pollution in and enhance the quality of the Great Lakes basin; to exercise dynamic leadership and follow-up supporting the work of IJC boards, commissions, and other Great Lakes and St. Lawrence institutions in which Canada has a voice; to treat appointments to the IJC and other Great Lakes and St. Lawrence institutions with objectivity and impartiality, appointing the most qualified and credible people to vacancies as they occur;
    - b) to support the Virtual Elimination Task Force's recommendation, and act promptly and decisively on the bilateral "sunsetting" of certain critical toxic substances. In this connection, a Liberal government will use the forthcoming five-year review of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA), and we will coordinate appropriate "sunsetting" priority lists as applicable with Ontario and Quebec;

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- c) to commit Canada to decisive regulatory action, through CEPA or other legislative instruments, to match EPA regulatory efforts in regard to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence ecosystem. A Liberal government commits itself to regulatory initiatives whose standards will never be less stringent than those required by the IJC, or those of the US;
- d) to endorse the Virtual Elimination Task Force's recommendations of a Great Lakes Clean Industries Initiative and of a bilateral Great Lakes Toxic Uses and Release Inventory; to participate actively and seek a leadership role in the "Great Lakes Tomorrow" initiative proposed by Governor Voinovich of Ohio;
- e) to coordinate with Ontario and Quebec joint policies and initiatives relating to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. We will make vigorous efforts to re-negotiate and renew the Canada-Ontario Agreement, which has been allowed to lapse for over two years (March 1991). We will also take a leadership role through the St. Lawrence Action Plan, coordinating joint efforts and initiatives with Quebec relating to the St. Lawrence River.

Through its commitment to initiate a joint infrastructure program with provincial and municipal governments, a Liberal government will make it a specific condition of its participation that municipalities involved in water and sewage treatment infrastructure programs practice water conservation and provide systematically for ongoing infrastructure maintenance.