



TO: The Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management
FR: Margaret Wooster, Executive Director, Great Lakes United
RE: Testimony for "Great Lakes Restoration Management" hearing
DT: July 16, 2003

Dear Mr. Chairman and Subcommittee members:

Thank you for inviting Great Lakes United to testify today concerning government management in the context of Great Lakes ecosystem restoration. We applaud the leadership of members of the Great Lakes Task Force in both the House and Senate in bringing this issue to the fore. We support these efforts to promote Great Lakes restoration and look forward to working with you to make this happen.

Great Lakes United is an international coalition of individuals and over 170 organizations representing hundreds of thousands of individuals from the eight Great Lakes states, two Canadian provinces and tribal territories within the Great Lakes region. Our main constituents are environmental organizations like National Wildlife Federation, Lake Michigan Federation, Sierra Club; conservation organizations like Trout Unlimited; and labor groups like Canadian Auto Workers and United Auto Workers. We work at the local, regional and international level on projects, programs and policies to protect and restore the health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River ecosystem. To this end, over the past two years Great Lakes United coordinated thirty Great Lakes groups in the creation of a citizens "Action Agenda," a summary of which, *The Great Lakes Green Book*, is presented with this testimony.

We essentially agree with the findings of the April 2003 GAO report on Great Lakes management. *Similar findings have been issued by Canada's auditor general, who concluded "the federal government [of Canada] is uniquely positioned to take a basin-wide perspective, but so far it has not. The quality of existing data sets is deteriorating; the federal capacity is going in the wrong direction."*

Inadequate data and poor government coordination are evidenced in declining ecosystem health. Human health advisories against eating the fish, swimming in the waters, and breathing the air are increasing across the region. On Lake Erie, four years of an avian botulism epidemic has killed tens of thousands of loons and other fish-eating birds, and a dead zone of oxygen-less water covered two-thirds of the basin last August. The fact that this came as a surprise to Great Lakes managers tells us everything about current monitoring. Human health effects from contaminated air, soil and sediments range from high regional cancer rates to lower I.Q.s in children of mothers who eat Great Lakes fish. In a 2002 State of the Lakes Ecosystem report, US and Canadian scientists ranked 70 percent of lake health indicators as "mixed," "mixed deteriorating" or "poor." Among those indicators are increasing trends in per capita consumption of energy and water, which will place additional stress on an already beleaguered ecosystem.

The GAO report rightly points out that we need an overarching strategy that clearly defines agency roles and priority funding for Great Lakes restoration. We would like to elaborate on four major needs raised in the report: funding, agency coordination, public involvement and the need to go beyond existing policies and programs.

Funding. For at least the past decade there has been a lack of funding for even the most basic protection and restoration efforts like monitoring and clean-up. For example, although the International Joint Commission identified 31 US toxic hotspots causing harm to humans and wildlife almost 20 years ago, these 31 hotspots still exist today. The IJC estimates it will cost \$7.4 billion to clean them up. Congress recently approved the Great Lakes Legacy Act, authorizing \$53 million per year for five years for sediment clean-up, which we hoped would restart clean-up efforts, but the funding proposed in the 2004 budget was only about one-third of that or .2% of the total estimated cost.

We need a dedicated revenue stream over a period of at least 10 years sufficient to complete the job. Every year we wait makes the job harder and costlier, and prolongs a major source of ecosystem damage.

Many Great Lakes protective programs are consistently under funded including those administered by GLNPO, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Yet elimination of toxic discharges, sea lamprey control and restoration of native species, to name a few of the affected programs, are critical to Great Lakes recovery.

Government coordination. At this point in time there is no one federal agency and no consortium of state agencies with the capacity to develop and oversee a Great Lakes restoration initiative. We need an independent body (not controlled by any one agency), which defines goals, targets and timelines and accordingly prioritizes the projects that should be funded. This body should be led by the region's representatives – federal, state, local and tribal – with strong citizen involvement, strong public accountability in terms of meeting its charge, and a mechanism for cross-border coordination. It should define criteria for funding projects to help leverage restoration goals.

For example, states eligible for funding would have to demonstrate that they have plans in place for achieving water conservation or pollution prevention goals. Projects eligible for funding would have to demonstrate benefits consistent with restoration goals. All agencies involved in projects would enter into cooperative agreements that clearly delineate their roles and timelines.

Public involvement: There must be a strong public role in Great Lakes protection and restoration. The public must be represented on any advisory body, federal or state, that determines a restoration plan, priorities or fundable projects in order to help guarantee the ongoing integrity of the process. There must also be opportunity for wide public comment on restoration plans at strategic points in their development.

Please refer to testimony submitted by the Michigan Environmental Council for more specific recommendations concerning public involvement.

Policy change: There are also a number of policy and institutional changes that are critical to Great Lakes restoration and future protection. I will offer here just two examples.

1. We need to extend the focus of our strategies beyond reacting to ecosystem harm, to proactive initiatives. For example, toxic reduction strategies must include support for policies and programs that create alternative choices in Great Lakes communities such as incentives for resource conservation, green energy, and pollution prevention.
2. We need to carefully appraise the mandates of existing institutions with the greatest influence on Great Lakes waters such as the US Army Corps of Engineers, who accounted for almost half the U.S. federal environmental spending in the Great Lakes over the past ten years, according to the GAO report. The Corps's traditional mandate has been to protect and enhance private property, not ecosystems. In fact, improvements in the name of flood control, navigation and shoreline hardening are usually directly detrimental to ecosystem health. Therefore it is important that if agencies like the Corps are to have a role in Great Lakes restoration, that it be tightly defined and publicly accountable.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak.