

Fulfilling Congress' Commitment to Restoring the Greatness of the Great Lakes

by *Congressmen Peter Hoekstra and Sander Levin*

More than 30 years after the Clean Water Act was passed, the Great Lakes are much cleaner, but they still face critical challenges.

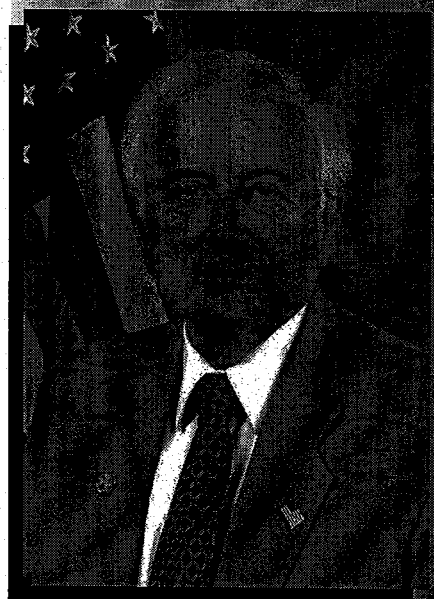
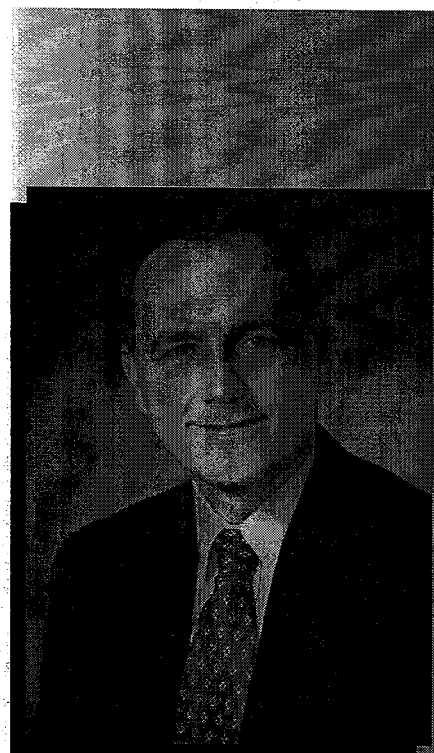
Over 170 invasive species plague the Lakes, and new non-native species – like the Asian Carp – are at the back door. Mercury deposition from coal-fired plants, and the accumulation of other toxic chemicals, has led to more than 1,500 fish consumption advisories. Non-point source pollution degrades water quality and impacts the critical habitat that is essential for thriving fish and wildlife populations. And it seems like every time there is a significant rain event, sewage is poured into the Lakes through combined sewer overflows.

Over the years, there have been a great number of initiatives and programs to deal with the numerous environmental challenges facing the Great Lakes. Rather than the piecemeal approach we have used in the past, we envision a more integrated, basin-wide approach. This approach is modeled on the Everglades restoration legislation approved by Congress in 2000. During the 1990s, it became clear that the Everglades were dying and that a comprehensive restoration plan was needed. Congress responded with a multi-year \$8 billion plan. No less than the Everglades, we need a similar restoration plan for the Great Lakes.

Our approach is titled the *Great Lakes Restoration Financing Act* (H.R. 2720), legislation we introduced last year with a broad bipartisan coalition.

The legislation authorizes \$4 billion over five years in block grants to deal with invasive species, toxic sediments, wetlands preservation and other problems confronting the Lakes. It would be up to the states and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to determine how to spend the money. Each state has a unique set of programs, and the Great Lakes Restoration Financing Act allows the states to work with the EPA to develop and implement a tailored restoration strategy.

The same day that we introduced the *Great Lakes Restoration Financing Act* in the House, Congressman Carl Levin, D-Michigan, and Congressman Mike DeWine, R-Ohio, introduced similar legislation in the Senate.



“From the beginning, there was a recognition that we would need to have strong bipartisan support from all eight Great Lakes states.”

Today 106 members in the House - 61 Democrats, 44 Republicans and one independent - and 15 senators have co-sponsored the two restoration bills in Congress. All eight governors from states bordering the Great Lakes have endorsed the plan, and the Great Lakes Cities Initiative, a consortium of mayors from towns along the Great Lakes, has come on board as well.

Our legislation also has the support of 43 advocacy organizations including groups as diverse as the Lake Michigan Federation, the National Marine Manufacturers, and Ducks Unlimited. Even with this broad base of support, we cannot let up in our efforts to pass this legislation.

First, these efforts begin with the need to preserve and expand the coalition supporting these restoration bills in Congress. From the beginning, there was a recognition that we would need to have strong bipartisan support from all eight Great Lakes states. For example, of the 12 Michigan members co-sponsoring the bill in the House, six are Democrats and six are Republicans. Now we need to expand the outreach effort to Members of Congress who represent districts outside the Great Lakes region and urge them to join us in co-sponsoring the legislation.

Second, we need the active support of the Administration to pass the bill. The Great Lakes account for 18 percent of the surface freshwater on the planet and 90 percent of the surface freshwater in the United States. The Lakes are an invaluable resource and a national treasure. The federal government must be a full partner in the effort to set them on the path toward recovery.

It is encouraging to note that the White House is recognizing the need to meet these challenges. By executive order, earlier this year it created a task force that will establish a regional collaboration among the numerous state, tribal and local governments and federal programs to provide direction to Great Lakes restoration and management. Also, the President budgeted \$45 million in 2005 for the *Great Lakes Legacy Act*, a significant demonstration of support for the Great Lakes.

Funding the *Great Lakes Restoration Financing Act* will be the final hurdle. To receive congressional funding, Congress must first authorize a program. The *Great Lakes Restoration Financing Act* provides the authorization, but once passed, we need to ensure that it receives the necessary appropriations. It is the final stage in which good programs often fall short.

Great Lakes restoration ranks high among the several environmental challenges and opportunities facing Congress. No legislation of this significance passes overnight, but we will keep pressing this issue in Congress until restoration of the Great Lakes becomes reality.

The 108th Congress was significant because it saw the formation of a new, broad-based movement within the House and Senate to support comprehensive restoration of the Great Lakes. All of us must come together in the months and years ahead to finish the job of protecting and restoring the grandeur of this incredible treasure.

Congressman Pete Hoekstra has served Michigan's Second Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1993. He currently serves on the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. He earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Hope College and an MBA from the University of Michigan. Before being elected to serve in Congress, he was Vice President of Marketing for office furniture manufacturer Herman Miller, a Fortune 500 company.

Congressman Sander Levin, D-Royal Oak, has represented the 12th District of Michigan in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1983. He is a senior member of the House Ways and Means Committee and serves as the Ranking Member on the Trade Subcommittee. For the past five years, he has worked to secure federal funding to curb sewer overflows into the Clinton River and Lakes St. Clair.

Open Water Disposal of Dredged Materials Further Contaminates the Great Lakes

by Kathleen Law

Recently the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has proposed to dredge Lake Michigan to facilitate navigation, and then to dump the dredged materials elsewhere within the lake as a means for disposal of sediments. This disposal method is already being employed by the Army Corps in the Ohio waters of Lake Erie. Depending on the location, dredged materials are contaminated sediment. For example, Lake Erie bottomlands are covered with low-level Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs). Stirring that material up, and then relocating it in open water is less costly than disposing the material in a landfill or other appropriate facility. However, this method of disposal is basically creating inappropriate landfills in our Great Lakes, as well as creating potential negative health impacts to indigenous fish, wildlife and humans.

