

# CARING FOR LAKE SUPERIOR AND THE GREAT LAKES

Minnesota is blessed to be the headwaters state for the Great Lakes, counting 150 miles of Lake Superior shoreline among our natural assets. As the largest of the Great Lakes, Lake Superior contains 10 percent of the world's fresh surface water and over half of the water in all of the Great Lakes. It provides drinking water, transportation, jobs, recreation, and a way of life for millions of people.

Although Lake Superior remains the cleanest of the Great Lakes, it is not immune to the problems facing the lower lakes, and human activity increasingly threatens its health. Such threats include:

- Invasive species carried into the lake in ships' ballast water, and then spread into rivers and inland lakes;
- Untreated and poorly treated sewage discharged into the lake;
- Airborne pollution from mining and other industrial activities that contribute to the lake's toxics load;
- Numerous sites at the mouth of the Saint Louis River (the largest U.S. tributary to Lake Superior) that remain contaminated from historic industrial activity;
- Shoreline development that has already degraded water quality and wildlife habitat on streams and lakes throughout the lower Great Lakes, including the growing demand for homes on the shore; and
- Growth in the demand for fresh water across the United States and around the world.

We must act now to restore the health of the Great Lakes – we have solutions and it is time to use them. Action is required at both the state and federal level to protect our drinking water, our health, our economy, and our way of life.

At the state level, this includes achieving an effective anti-degradation policy to protect water quality in the Lake Superior Basin; adopting and enforcing water clean-up plans; opposing efforts to weaken water quality standards; and supporting the adoption of shoreline standards that protect water quality.

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## Funding Great Lakes Restoration

Great Lakes residents celebrated a major achievement in 2009 with Congressional approval of President Barack Obama's budget request for \$475 million to begin to implement the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, a coordinated multi-agency approach to target the most significant problems in the Great Lakes. Federal dollars will begin flowing to the states in early 2010. An ongoing challenge will be to ensure that state funding, including that generated by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, is available to meet federal match requirements.



## Restoring Clean Water Act Protections

Clean Water Act protections for rivers, headwater streams, and wetlands are essential for Great Lakes restoration. Two recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions have placed millions of acres of isolated wetlands and an estimated 50 percent of Minnesota's stream miles at risk of losing federal safeguards. Legislation currently before Congress to restore full protection of the Clean Water Act to waters and wetlands is necessary to protect Minnesota's lakes, rivers and streams, including Lake Superior.

## Aquatic Invasive Species

The Great Lakes are now home to more than 160 non-native aquatic invasive species; 87 of these are found in Lake Superior. Ballast water discharged from oceangoing and Great Lakes vessels is the primary source of these introductions, and Duluth receives more ballast water than any port on the Great Lakes.

In 2008, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency adopted a ballast water discharge permit program for commercial vessels travelling in the Minnesota waters of Lake Superior. The program applies to both oceangoing and Great Lakes-only vessels over 50 meters in length.

While Minnesota's program and those of other states are welcome steps, a comprehensive federal ballast water program is needed to protect the Great Lakes as a whole and provide a consistent framework for state regulatory programs. The critical component of any federal program is that it must address lake carriers as well as salt water vessels in order to protect Lake Superior.

## Great Lakes Water Resources Compact Implementation

In 2008 Congress passed the Great Lakes-Saint Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact, which provides a comprehensive management framework for achieving sustainable water use and resource protection in the Great Lakes region. All states and provinces are now taking steps toward implementation. Minnesota must meet several required deadlines to implement the Compact, including developing water conservation and efficiency goals and objectives by December 2010. A strong conservation program is essential to ensure that the promise of the Compact is fulfilled.

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