

Actions Toward A Sustainable Great Lakes

Conference Panel presentation Actions Taken, and Action Needed

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**By George H. Kuper
President, Council of Great Lakes Industries**

Thank for you for the opportunity to participate in this conference, on this distinguished panel, and to specifically focus on actions taken and action needed for a sustainable Great Lakes region.

The topic of sustainability is very important to the Council of Great Lakes Industries. CGLI is an organization of companies and associations who have significant financial interests in the Great Lakes Region. The members of CGLI belong because of their commitment to sustainable development as embodied in CGLI's mission – to promote the economic growth and vitality of the region in harmony with its human and natural resources.

As we all know a “restoration agenda” is at the forefront of discussions in our region because there is some potential for a great deal of U.S. Federal money to flow to the Basin (via S. 1398 and H. 2720). And, I believe there is a potential for additional Canadian Federal resources via a possible renewal of the Great Lakes Program. I want you all to know that industry is supportive of bringing this new money to the Region.

We do have one very important phenomena going for us in the Region; one that makes this Region the envy of others. We have a long history of working together in a coordinated approach to Great Lakes issues. We have government, industry and environmental groups working together through bodies like the Great Lakes Commission and in formal programs under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement - such as the BiNational Toxics Strategy - for the overall benefit of the Region. Its not necessarily smooth, nor pretty, but the region has some significant successes that should inspire us to taking on greater challenges.

However, CGLI believes that for the future of the Region we would stand both a better chance of actually getting potential Federal monies, and improving the ecosystem of the region, if we had a more comprehensive understanding of what we're going to do.

In other words, we need a plan of action for the region. There is a school of thought that says 'just get the money and then worry about how to spend it.' Industry finds it difficult to operate in that way as there is always competition for capital – its always scarce / especially when it has to be raised from skeptical investors – the Feds in this case. This may be a moot issue as it doesn't look like large amounts of federal funds are going to be flowing our way soon.

Nevertheless, industry does have concerns about what's currently being discussed as the region's agenda for a significant investment of time, effort, and money.

To industry, the potential of this large appropriation for the region represents an outstanding opportunity for the future of the Region – an opportunity to define and achieve an economically vital region in harmony with its human and natural resources. This requires a sustainable development agenda that includes:

- economic growth,

- environmental protection, and
- social equity.

It means managing all our resources -- economic, natural and social -- to meet the needs of future generations without compromising current needs. Our concern with all the current restoration discussions is that the term “restoration” seems to have everybody looking at the past. Now is the time to focus on the Region’s future.

For example:

- In spite of the future dates, only two of the following U.S. Policy Committee’s objectives (from their “Plan for the New Millennium”) are not dealing with legacy issues:
 - by 2010, vessels entering the Great Lakes will discharge ballast water free of invasive species;
 - by 2005, clean-up and de-list 3 Areas of Concern with a cumulative total of 10 by 2010;
 - by 2007, reduce concentrations of PCBs in lake trout and walleye by 25%;
 - by 2007, 90% of Great Lakes beaches will be open 95% of the season;
 - by 2007, establish 300,000 acres of buffer strips in agricultural lands;
 - by 2010, restore and rehabilitate 100,000 acres of coastal and inland wetlands in the basin. And,
 - accelerate the pace of sediment remediation leading to the clean-up of all sites by 2025. And,
- The Great Lakes Governors last year sent a list of their priorities to the Congress that included:
 - Ensuring the sustainable use of our water resources while confirming that the States retain authority over water use and diversions of Great Lakes waters.
 - Promoting programs to protect human health against adverse effects of pollution in the Great Lakes ecosystem.
 - Controlling pollution from diffuse sources into water, land and air.
 - Continuing to reduce the introduction of persistent bio-accumulative toxics into the great Lakes ecosystem.
 - Stopping the introduction and spread of non-native aquatic invasive species.
 - Enhancing fish and wildlife by restoring and protecting coastal wetlands, fish and wildlife habitats.
 - Restoring to environmental health the Areas of Concern identified by the International Joint Commission as needing remediation.
 - Standardizing and enhancing the methods by which information is collected, recorded and shared within the region. And,
 - Adopting sustainable use practices that protect environmental resources and may enhance the recreational and commercial value of our Great Lakes.

Now, I ask you – what’s wrong with these lists?

Nothing, really, I suppose. Except they’re primarily dealing with the legacies of the past, most of which are now – more or less - being addressed. Maybe not at the pace with which we are all comfortable, but they are being addressed. Many at this meeting already run programs aimed at some of those objectives! But, where is our agenda for the future?

The region has a number of challenges ranging from legacies of the past, to meeting the challenges of current programs such as the BiNational Toxics Strategy, to addressing the future of aging infrastructure, population growth and energy infrastructure issues.

We're doing a pretty good job with the first two categories – the legacies of the past and the challenges of current programs. But, where's the leadership on issues of the future?

Do we know the age or capacity of sewer treatment facilities in the basin or have a plan to increase that capacity? Do we know the type of commerce our transportation infrastructure needs to be able to support, so we can generate the wealth that future generations deserve? Can we anticipate an adequate supply of skills necessary to produce the goods and deliver the services needed by future generations?

These – and additional - challenges need to be identified and addressed if the future of the Basin is to be secured.

In truth, neither industry nor any other regional stakeholder can alone identify the breadth of issues a plan for the region should address. But, a CGLI policy statement outlines the elements of a sustainable development plan that would have the region focusing on what we believe to be the emerging challenges, not just the challenges from the past (see "Defining the Great Lakes Restoration Agenda." available at: www.cgli.org.)

In general, industry sees its role as producing economic growth while meeting the region's needs for goods and services in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. However, we go to great lengths to articulate what industry can be expected to bring to a well thought out and well led combined effort.

But industry's commitment to sustainable development is by itself, insufficient to meet the sustainable development needs of the basin. Industry and other stakeholders need leadership. I'm tempted to say: "Government must provide leadership and good governance." But, maybe that leadership needs to come from some other source/some other stakeholder or group of stakeholders.

In summary, to attain a sustainable Region the following steps forward are needed:

- All major stakeholders together need to address the issues in each of the three categories facing our region: ecological balance; economic growth; and social progress.
- The region needs a plan that will analyze where resources of money and effort can be best applied for the most effective sustainable outcome.
- Two operating principles need to be applied in implementing a plan. One principle, already used effectively in the economic aspects of sustainable development, is risk assessment and risk management. Risk management and risk assessment must also be applied to the environmental and social elements of sustainable development policy so that we are working on problems that represent threats objectively determined. The second principle is to establish clear goals, objectives and timetables to address all future issues under the plan.

There's obviously a lot to be done. Let's get on with it - together. Thank you.