

Chapter 1

Introduction



The governments of Canada and the United States (“the Parties”) signed the first Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (“Agreement”) in 1972. They concluded the present Agreement in 1978, revised it in 1983 and, in 1987, added new annexes through a Protocol. The Agreement remains one of the most farsighted of international agreements negotiated in modern history. It embraces concepts of ecosystem integrity, pollution prevention and control, remediation, and human health and welfare. These concepts provide a blueprint for future stewardship and enjoyment of the Great Lakes and their associated watersheds and biotic communities. Thirteen years have passed since the addition of the Protocol to the Agreement.

In this Tenth Biennial Report, the International Joint Commission (IJC) assesses the Parties’ progress in implementing the Agreement. It addresses several annexes to the Agreement and the Parties’ responses to their commitments, in cooperation with state, provincial and other levels of government. The annexes addressed include Annex 2 (Remedial Action Plans and Lakewide Management Plans), Annexes 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 (The Coast Guard Annexes), Annex 11 (Surveillance and Monitoring), Annex 12 (Persistent Toxic Substances), Annex 13 (Pollution from Nonpoint Sources), Annex 14 (Contaminated Sediment), and Annex 15 (Airborne Toxic Substances).

This report also emphasizes the Parties’ binational program responses, which include the State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conferences (SOLEC), the Four Agency Framework, the Great Lakes Binational Toxics Strategy, and the Lake Superior Zero Discharge Demonstration Program. Binational approaches are a challenging aspect of the effort to solve problems in the Great Lakes. Such approaches generally require collective activities and decision-making and depend on cooperation, coordination and joint action. Many of the recommendations contained in this report reflect the need for a sustained level of effort, and their efficacy depends on a significant binational approach and commitment.

Several topics emerged from the review of the annexes and related programs: indicators on environmental conditions of the lakes, impacts of land-use practices, alien invasive species, and information and data management needs. These issues cut across many of the annexes and generated considerable discussion at the 1999 Great Lakes Water Quality Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Although it is not the purpose of this report to focus directly on the public comments received at the 1999 Forum in Milwaukee, the many presentations and submissions provide a substantial public record. The Commission has referred to this record in preparing its Tenth Biennial Report and in setting future IJC priorities to be undertaken by the Agreement Advisory Boards and the Council of Great Lakes Research Managers.