

Chapter 8

Other Issues

8.1 Issues Raised by the Public

The Commission encourages public input and comment at all Great Lakes meetings and events in which it participates. It also invites formal submissions at Commission meetings. With the importance of the Great Lakes to citizens and the broad significance of the Agreement, many local concerns are often relevant, or perceived to be relevant, to water quality throughout the basin. Even when issues fall within other mandates and authorities, the Commission nonetheless appreciates the opportunity to consider such concerns within the context of the Agreement. Some of the ongoing concerns referenced in past reports include underwater timber salvage, lake bed mineral exploration, the diffusion of genetically modified organisms, loss of biodiversity and habitat, and the storage of nuclear waste casks on Lake Michigan shores. Current issues brought to the attention of the Commission include the following:

- Crandon Mine - a proposed copper, zinc, and lead mining development near Crandon, Wisconsin, with the potential to contaminate groundwater and interbasin water transfers from the Great Lakes basin.
- The destruction of natural habitat in Great Lakes tributaries, through such measures as eliminating waterfalls in order to improve habitat for nonnative sport fish.
- The mining of Great Lakes sand dunes and the loss of this unique nonrenewable ecological resource.
- The impact of nuclear reactors, and their decommissioning, in the Great Lakes basin.



8.2 Involvement of Local Governments

A particularly noteworthy event for the Commission is the annual International Great Lakes / St. Lawrence Mayors Conference. At the 1997 conference in Toledo, Ohio, a resolution was passed regarding healthy beaches, which provided a reference point for the development of an indicator based on the desired outcome of swimmability, as previously mentioned. In 1998 the conference was held in Windsor, Ontario, and included sessions addressing water quality and level issues, climate change, and management of contaminated sediment. The 1999 meeting in Montreal included a session on water quality and also discussed the water export issue. At its most recent conference in Gary, Indiana, the Great Lakes mayors passed a number of resolutions which address water quality and quantity concerns including the need to: renew the Canada-Ontario Agreement, develop appropriate ballast water standards and best management practices, support increased funding for Great Lakes cleanup and research, and assess and mitigate the impacts of persistent low water levels.

The Biennial Forum in Milwaukee also included a workshop on municipal issues, focusing on the impact of land use on water quality. The growing involvement and interest of local governments in Great Lakes issues is significant for progress under the Agreement. With devolution, the involvement of citizens in cleanup efforts, and the development of key partnerships that support implementation and decision-making, local governments are playing an increasingly important role in implementing Great Lakes programs. An emerging institutional challenge for the Parties is to encourage and sustain this interest further by strengthening the mechanisms through which local governments can participate in Agreement activities.

8.3 Response of Governments to Commission Recommendations

The Commission recognizes the effort involved in compiling responses to biennial report recommendations. The Canadian Government gave its response at the Biennial Forum in Milwaukee in September 1999. The United States gave its response a few weeks later, referring to the *1999 Biennial Progress Report to the IJC* which, as of the time of this 10th Biennial Report remains unavailable. However, the Commission is concerned that neither Government's response has been timely or complete. The Commission reminds the Parties that the timeliness and completeness of their responses to Commission recommendations and their progress reports reflect their commitment to the Agreement and their willingness to be open and transparent to the public.