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GOVERNORS APPLAUD FEDERAL LEGISLATION TO RESTORE THE GREAT LAKES

Chicago, Illinois –The Governors of the eight Great Lakes States today expressed strong support for the Great Lakes Collaboration Implementation Act introduced in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. The bills, sponsored by Senator Mike DeWine (R-Ohio) and Senator Carl Levin (D-Michigan), Congressman Vernon Ehlers (R-Michigan 3rd) and Congressman Rahm Emanuel (D-Illinois 5th), would implement the recommendations of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, a strategic planning effort in which the Governors played a leadership role.

“We are very encouraged to see bipartisan support in Congress for large-scale, long-term funding for the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Governors have repeatedly requested this funding and are eager to work together toward enactment,” said Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle, chair of the Council of Great Lakes Governors. “The Great Lakes are threatened by many environmental pressures. A national response is needed to protect and restore this national treasure. We applaud the sponsors and cosponsors for moving forward before conditions in the Lakes further worsen.”

28 Congressional representatives from throughout the Great Lakes basin have signed on to the bills. The Great Lakes hold approximately 95% of North America’s fresh surface water and more than 35 million U.S. residents live in the Great Lakes basin.

"The Great Lakes play an important environmental, economic and recreational role for millions of people in New York and surrounding States," New York Governor George Pataki said. "This legislation is critical to preserving and sustaining these valuable resources and we look forward to continuing to work with our partners as we move forward to implement the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy."

Ohio Governor Bob Taft singled out the bills’ provision for federal assistance to communities struggling with enormous costs to eliminate sewage overflows to the Great Lakes and their tributaries. “The manufacturing strength of the Great Lakes region is centered in our cities, and those cities are burdened with aging, poorly designed sewer systems that overflow. As a result, people are prevented from enjoying the beautiful beaches of the Great Lakes,” said Taft. “I’m pleased to see these bills recognize the need for more, not less, federal funding to address the issue of sewer overflows.”

The bills place particular emphasis on the control of invasive species. The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy notes that a new invasive species enters the Great Lakes ecosystem every eight months. “Invasive species are destructive to our ecosystem and create tremendous costs for communities and businesses throughout the region,” noted Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm. “It is time for Congress to enact stronger controls to help keep non-native species out of our waters.”

The Governors are particularly concerned about the potential for the Asian carp to enter the Great Lakes via the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich praised the bills for including federal funding to complete construction of two permanent barriers and to operate both. “Asian carp have the potential to wipe out native species and devastate ecosystems in Lake Michigan and the rest of the Great Lakes. As Great Lakes Governors, we've stepped up to help with the cost of carp barriers to prevent an invasion. We're glad to see that through this legislation, the federal government is prepared to do its part as well,” he said.

The Council of Great Lakes Governors participates on the Executive Committee of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, through which 1500 people participated in creating the Great Lakes restoration strategy last year. The Governors are seeking increased funding for Great Lakes projects in the federal budget, pending passage of a comprehensive restoration bill such as the Great Lakes Collaboration Implementation Act.

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