

U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
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Testimony

The Honorable Richard M. Daley
Mayor
City of Chicago

*Presented by Marcia Jimenez, Commissioner,
City of Chicago Department of the Environment*

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. Welcome to Chicago. I am very pleased that the Commission has chosen to host this meeting in Chicago.

Your presence here, on the shores of Lake Michigan, underscores just how important the oceans and the Great Lakes are to each other. It is easy to overlook, given the physical distance between the Great Lakes and our ocean coasts, that these great waters are linked not only hydrologically, but also environmentally and economically.

I'd like to begin today by explaining how important the Great Lakes are to those who reside along or near them.

Lake Michigan is an integral part of the City of Chicago's identity. It is our most valuable natural resource, and it provides an irreplaceable ecosystem and an unparalleled economic engine for Chicago and the region. Lake Michigan for us generates jobs and tourist opportunities, and it is our main supply of fresh drinking water. This great lake provides countless recreational options, and supports research and education that benefits millions.

The same can be said for all of the other cities and towns that border all of the Great Lakes. Together the managers of these cities and rural areas around the Great Lakes have the daily responsibility of protecting this great resource.

Having worked on these issues myself, and increasingly in conjunction with other mayors, I am positive that you cannot separate the economic, natural and quality of

life dividends that we reap from these Great Lakes.

What is absent is a long term plan for restoring and protecting this great natural treasure – a system wide plan that will address key issues associated with the Great Lakes such as international shipping that has brought in many invasive species, the value of the drinking water supply to those within and without the Great Lakes basin, drilling in the lakes, toxic sediment cleanup and much more.

The City of Chicago, and other cities and rural areas around the Great Lakes, need federal support for the development of a Great Lakes protection and restoration plan.

I believe that we are increasingly equipped to give back to nature, and to improve upon this resource for our own benefit and for those that follow us. With good policies, sound science and appropriate investments, we can deliver on that goal.

Manage the Resource of the Great Lakes

We must manage the resource of the Great Lakes for our collective use and for the future. Municipalities are on the front lines of management, as we care for the shores of the lakes and safeguard most of the interactions between people and the water. Yet the Great Lakes are a vast and complex ecosystem that is shared by all communities.

Healthy Beaches

We must all protect the recreational and economic value of our beaches. Chicago tests daily the levels of e. coli bacteria at each of the city's beaches to make sure they are safe for public use. When concentrations are too high, we ban swimming.

Accurate and timely tests are extremely important in order not to expose beach-goers to harmful levels of bacteria and also to avoid banning swimming unnecessarily. Yet the testing we do, and the standards we measure it against in making decisions, are not timely and therefore not as protective of the public health and safety as we want them to be. We need better science.

In Chicago, we began the most exhaustive study of beaches and e.coli that we are aware of, collecting more than 4000 samples in a single summer, from all of the city's beaches under all types of conditions. We found that e. coli concentrations are the result of complex factors, ranging from weather and water conditions to different sources of bacteria, and even the shape and size of particular beaches.

When Chicago finds it necessary to ban swimming at a particular beach on a particular

day, the reason is linked to a broader range of factors than anyone can now accurately determine. We need a different approach to this problem on a federal level because local communities are affected by environmental conditions that are outside their jurisdiction to control. The federal government must work with us to gather and interpret health data, and to provide guidance and support that keeps pace with what we learn.

That being said, one of the confirmed sources of e.coli bacteria on beaches is inadequate waste-water infrastructure. It is unacceptable today for raw sewage to be discharged into these lakes, but it happens during big rains. While managing this infrastructure is a key local responsibility, ensuring that local governments have the resources necessary to do so, is a federal responsibility that plays to the larger point I made that communities are bound together by this ecosystem.

Protect the Great Lakes

Federal policy must above all seek to protect the Great Lakes, for all they mean to us as a natural environment, an economic resource and a cornerstone of our shared culture and identity. Clearly we must clean up pollution that has been introduced to the Lakes and prevent further degradation.

But protecting the Great Lakes cannot stop there. Ultimately, protecting the Great Lakes means evaluating our decisions according to what is the best we can do. It means seeking always to enhance their quality, to improve our use of the resource and to maintain or advance their utility to us and their integrity as a natural system.

Invasive Species

Controlling invasive species is a critical example, and one for which the federal government's leadership and cooperation is essential. Non-native nuisance species can permanently and tragically alter the ecosystem, with devastating effects on commerce and recreation, and on the regional economy.

Zebra mussels and round gobi are two that are already in Lake Michigan. Asian carp is a species we hope to turn away from the Lakes. There are any number of other species that we would not want to introduce into the Great Lakes if at all possible, and it is certainly possible to do more than we are doing now.

Invasive species are a constant and growing threat to the well-being of the Great Lakes, and current programs are not up to the task. In the short term, inspections of large ships coming into the lakes and enforcement must be enhanced and funded. I urge you also on a federal level to consider policies to prevent the introduction of invasive species through the ballast water of ships entering US ports, particularly fresh

water ports such as the Great Lakes. To be fully protective and fair, requirements must apply to all ships, domestic and foreign. We must view this as a matter of national interest and insist on enforcement at the highest level.

Conserve the Great Lakes

Conservation is an ethic that we must address as stewards of the Great Lakes. We must protect the Great Lakes by improving the resource. To do that, we need for Mayors to be involved in these issues.

Infrastructure

Here in Chicago, we have made a significant investment in replacing and repairing infrastructure so that we do not withdraw more water from Lake Michigan than is needed. We've been successful. At a time when the population of this region has been growing, by replacing old leaking infrastructure we have actually reduced our withdrawal from Lake Michigan.

This is another example of the kind of actions municipalities can and must take, and the kind of concern that necessarily involves the federal government as well. Part of a funded strategy for protecting and restoring the Great Lakes would almost certainly include the infrastructure investments cities need to make.

I commend the Governors and Premiers for their work thus far on Annex 2001 to the Great Lakes Charter. In particular, I support the overarching directive that access to the resource should depend upon performance improving the resource. I also believe the original charter needs to be modified to allow for local involvement at every level of decision making that concerns these great lakes.

Local Role

Finally, I believe it is imperative for Mayors and other local government officials to have ongoing and meaningful opportunities to influence the development and implementation of the policies you have been charged with reviewing.

The federal government should be coordinating fully with all who have an interest in these water resources. I want to thank you again for seeking that input by scheduling this meeting here in Chicago, the largest city on the Great Lakes.

This past May, I convened mayors representing cities on the southern end of Lake Michigan, from Milwaukee WI to Gary IN, to discuss issues of common importance. This fall I will invite those same mayors, and Mayors from some of the larger cities

throughout the Great Lakes, to continue the discussion.

The goal is to formulate a Great Lakes Protection and Restoration Strategy. Our plan is to enlist the support of the Governors around the Great Lakes, and to make the new Congress aware of our agenda as early as possible.

A Great Lakes Protection and Restoration Strategy would identify the projects, programs and policies we believe necessary to protect, conserve and manage the tremendous resources of the Great Lakes for generations to come. This plan will identify the capacities and resources that local and state governments bring to the table.

After that, it will identify, comprehensively for the first time, how we can coordinate with the federal government to realize these goals. You can see how your work as a commission is important in this effort, as the best plan will be one that is integrated with other federal policies and priorities, especially as they relate directly to our waterways.

National Treasure

All of this leads to my concluding point. Federal policy must support, and work in concert with, the paramount goals of managing, protecting and conserving the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes are nothing less than a national treasure. Actually, they are more than a national treasure. The Great Lakes contain 18% of all the world's fresh water, by far the largest concentration of fresh water available for human use.

The well-being of the Great Lakes and the communities, both human and natural, that depend upon them, must concern us all, locally and nationally, and internationally. By the same token, federal policies must not compromise or sacrifice the integrity of the Great Lakes as an environmental and economic resource.

Thank you once again for holding this meeting in Chicago, and providing leaders on the Great Lakes the opportunity to contribute to the work of the US Commission on Ocean Policy. I appreciate your action on issues of concern for cities like Chicago, and I look forward to continuing the collaborative work that will be necessary to manage and protect the Great Lakes for the future.