

REMARKS

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TO

THE U.S. COMMISSION ON OCEAN POLICY

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Admiral Watkins and distinguished members of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. Good morning. On behalf of Governor George Ryan, I would like to extend you a warm welcome, and I am pleased that you are able to visit our great State of Illinois. I believe it is no accident that your last scheduled public meeting is here in the greatest coastal city in the country. I am confident that the testimony and input you will receive over the next two days will be of great assistance to you in preparing your recommendations and reports to the President and Congress. I also could not help but notice that while the Oceans Act of 2000 calls for a minimum of six public meetings across the nation's coastal area, this meeting is your eleventh. You are to be commended for your interest in seeking public input and comment, and I am confident that the quality of your work will benefit from your desire to maximize public input.

I want to recognize and thank one of your members for hosting this meeting. Mr. Ted Beattie is the President and Chief Executive Officer of the John G. Shedd Aquarium, the finest aquarium/oceanarium facility in the world. Since first opening its doors in 1929, millions of school age children in the Chicago metropolitan area have had their eyes and imaginations opened to the wonderful world of our oceans and freshwater seas. We are indeed very fortunate to have such a world class facility in a world class city. Thank you Mr. Beattie and the staff of the aquarium for the great work you do.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Lake Michigan and the Great Lakes to those of us who are fortunate to call this area home. Lake Michigan provides drinking water to over 6.7 million Illinois residents, well over half the population of our entire state. Our 61 miles of shoreline, with well over half in public ownership, provide recreational opportunities for millions of residents and tourists alike.

The other Great Lakes Governors and two Canadian Premiers recognize our stewardship responsibility and have been actively engaged for a number of years in collaborative efforts to pursue sound environmental and economic policies that will promote the sustainable use of our shared Great Lakes waters and water dependent

natural resources. While the eight Great Lakes states and two Canadian provinces are sovereign entities, we realize that only through close cooperation can we have an impact in preserving and restoring the Great Lakes ecosystem.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity this morning to address the distinguished members of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. The Great Lakes are a national treasure and a shared resource with our Canadian neighbors. I recognize our shared partnership with the federal government and truly do appreciate the interest that Congress and the current administration have shown to ensure that our nation's ocean and Great Lakes coastal policies reflect our common values and our desire to protect these resources for future generations.

As we begin this new millennium, it is fitting that your Commission undertake a comprehensive review of the nation's coastal areas. I support the Commission's list of 10 elements that should form the basis of a robust national ocean policy. I am pleased to inform you that the Great Lakes Governors are also undertaking a similar exercise in reviewing where we have been and where we need to go to ensure that we individually and collectively address the problems and challenges facing the Great Lakes basin. We have committed to the development of a Comprehensive Great Lakes Restoration Plan that will outline our vision, guiding principles and our priorities for action to ensure that needed restoration activities are undertaken, and which will allow for continued environmentally responsible economic growth in the region. It is our intention that this restoration plan include both short-term and long-term objectives. It very definitely will require commitments by the Great Lakes states and the U.S. Congress in resource allocation.

We plan to present our short-term goals and priorities to the public this fall, and we will make sure that this Commission receives a copy of our report for review. While the specifics of this plan are still being finalized, I can share with you the guiding principles that we believe are essential:

- Maximize reinvestment in our existing core urban areas, namely transportation and infrastructure networks, in order to enhance the economic viability of existing communities.
- Minimize the conversion of green space and the loss of critical habitat areas, farmland, forest and open spaces.
- Limit any net increase in the loading of pollutants, or the transfer of pollution loading from one medium to another.
- To the extent feasible, protect and restore the natural hydrology of the watershed and the flow characteristics of its streams, tributaries and wetlands.
- Restore the physical habitat and chemical water quality of the watershed to protect and restore diverse and thriving plant and animal communities and to preserve our water and endangered species.
- Encourage the inclusion of all economic and environmental factors into cost/benefit accounting in land use and development decisions.

- Avoid development decisions that shift economic benefits or environmental burdens from one location to another.
- Encourage all new development and redevelopment initiatives to protect and preserve access to historical, cultural and scenic resources.
- Promote public access to and enjoyment of our natural resources for all Great Lakes citizens.
- Encourage the development and sharing of useful research and information to meet the complex environmental challenges of the region.

I would like to offer a few additional comments for your consideration. It is often stated that the Great Lakes are the nation's fourth seacoast. As a representative of a Great Lakes State, I am concerned that primary attention at the federal level often seems to be directed to the salt water coasts. The unique characteristics of our shorelines and coastal processes, the fact that the submerged lands beneath the Great Lakes are held in trust by the states for the benefit of our citizens, and the fact that the Great Lakes contain 20% of the world's freshwater surface water supply, demand that the Great Lakes receive explicit recognition in your policy deliberations. I urge you to keep the Great Lakes in mind in all your discussions and hope that in your reports we merit specific discussion of federal policy and resource allocation needs.

I further recommend that the Commission give priority attention to the issue of aquatic nuisance species. I believe this is the most serious problem facing the Great Lakes today. The Great Lakes have been and continue to be profoundly affected by the presence of aquatic nuisance species. The accomplishments over the last 30 years in improving Great Lakes water quality through control of wastewater discharges, stormwater control, nutrient loading reduction and the development of a world renowned Great Lakes fishery, are being compromised by this insidious form of biological pollution. The threat of new introductions of aquatic nuisance species throughout our nation's waterways continues, in spite of the efforts at all levels of government over the last decade. The connection between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi/Illinois River system here in Chicago highlights the importance of having prevention strategies and methods in place that will protect our aquatic ecosystems from each others' invasive species. Clearly we need an analysis of where our shortcomings are and how we as a nation can solve this problem. Areas such as ballast water control, rapid response to a new introduction, and improved coordination between the many different agencies that have been tasked to address this problem are issues especially worthy of your deliberations.

Another problem area that I would suggest for your consideration is the growing concern over the bacteriological quality of Great Lakes beaches. Illinois, as in other Great Lakes states, has seen an increase in the number of days that our public beaches have had to close because they did not meet minimum standards. This problem has become more acute over the last three years, and it continues to be very difficult to pinpoint the problems. Local and state agencies have been very active in trying to determine local causes, but it may be that this problem is reflective of changes to the

Great Lakes ecosystem that we do not fully understand. This would be an issue that requires the resources and expertise of federal agencies.

The Great Lakes Governors and Premiers are currently engaged in efforts to improve our ability to manage water withdrawals, including consumptive uses and potential new diversions, to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Great Lakes basin's water resources. During this process, it has become apparent that our understanding of Great Lakes hydrology is woefully inadequate in order to provide the detail needed to manage water quantity issues on the Great Lakes. There is a need to improve our understanding of the basin's hydrology, particularly the interaction of groundwater and surface water. There is also a need to undertake the research needed to determine how decisions regarding withdrawals can impact the Great Lakes ecosystem. The primary federal research institutions such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory and the United States Geological Survey, along with other federal agencies such as the Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, need to be tasked and funded to develop the data bases and to perform the analyses needed to assist the States and Provinces in their efforts to "manage for sustainable water use" in the Great Lakes basin.

Distinguished members of the Commission, you have been given an opportunity to provide direction and leadership to the country to keep our coastal areas healthy and productive, ensuring that future generations will have the ability to enjoy all that our coastal areas offer. I thank you for the opportunity to present you with some of my thoughts and concerns, and I look forward to receiving a copy of your report. Thank you.