

Eight States Band Together to Protect the Great Lakes

A rather remarkable thing occurred recently in a nondescript meeting room in a downtown Chicago hotel. On December 8, 2008, the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact officially came into force. It is a very important step for all who care deeply about the future of the Great Lakes. With this action, Illinois and the other Great Lakes states of Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin have taken a bold step to ensure the long-term protection of the water resources of the Great Lakes basin.

Highlights of the compact include:

- Control over water withdrawals remains with the states, working in cooperation with the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec.



- The states will use a consistent standard to review proposed uses of basin water. The states will have flexibility regarding their water management programs and how to apply this standard.
- Current and future economic development will be protected through sustainable use and responsible management of basin waters.

- Although there is a general ban on new diversions of water out of the Great Lakes basin, Illinois' diversion of water from Lake Michigan as authorized under a United States Supreme Court Decree will not be subject to compact regulation.

- Regional goals and objectives for water conservation and efficiency will be developed, and they will be reviewed every five years. Each state will develop and implement a water conservation and efficiency program that may be voluntary or mandatory.

- There is a strong commitment to continued public involvement in the implementation of the compact.

For the compact to become effective, the legislatures of all the Great Lakes states and Congress had to ratify the compact. The fact that this happened in just over two years was testament to the broad, bi-partisan support the compact enjoyed. In addition, the involvement of a broad coalition of interest groups throughout the development of the compact was instrumental in its swift enactment into law.

The Great Lakes are a national treasure—important to our nation and the world as both an environmental and economic asset. Illinois is pleased to join with our Great Lakes neighbors to implement the compact. Ensuring that the Great Lakes are managed sustainably is a goal that will provide benefits to us all.

Ken M. Hanley

Additional information on the Great Lakes Compact is available at www.cglg.org.