



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release: December 4, 2007

THREE YEAR CANADA-U.S. EFFORT ASSESSES THE HEALTH OF THE DETROIT RIVER AND WESTERN LAKE ERIE

Over the past 35 years, U.S. and Canadian pollution prevention and control programs have resulted in substantial improvements in environmental quality in the Detroit River and western Lake Erie that have led to dramatic ecological recovery. However, there are also signs of deteriorating conditions. These findings are a result of a three-year study entitled "State of the Strait: Status and Trends of Key Indicators." Nearly 50 organizations and over 75 scientists participated in this three-year effort that compiled long-term trend data on 50 indicators, interpreted the data, translated the science for policy-makers and the public, and helped prepare a comprehensive and integrative assessment of ecosystem health.

Examples of environmental improvements include: reductions in oil, phosphorus, chloride, and untreated waste from combined sewer overflow discharges; declines in contaminants in fish and wildlife; and substantial progress in remediating contaminated sediment. These environmental improvements, in turn, have resulted in significant ecological recovery in this region, including an increase in the populations of bald eagles, peregrine falcons, lake sturgeon, lake whitefish, walleye, and burrowing mayflies in large areas from which they had been extirpated (locally extinct) or negatively impacted.

This ecological recovery is remarkable, but six key environmental and natural resource challenges remain: transportation expansion resulting in land use changes and regional population growth; nonpoint source pollution; toxic substances contamination; habitat loss and degradation; introduction of exotic species; and greenhouse gases and global warming. Research and monitoring must be sustained for effective management. Indeed, without research and monitoring, management cannot always make informed decisions. This assessment identified six priority research and monitoring needs: demonstrate and quantify cause-effect relationships; establish quantitative endpoints and desired future states; determine cumulative impacts and how indicators relate to each other; improve modeling and prediction; prioritize geographic areas for protection and restoration; and foster long-term monitoring for adaptive management.

Clearly, there is a need to continue this type of comprehensive and integrative assessment of ecosystem health. Therefore, the report recommends that resources be pooled on a regular basis (at least every five years) to undertake comprehensive and integrative assessments through a Canada-U.S. partnership of key management organizations. In addition, the report recommends that: a higher priority should be placed on quantifying targets for indicators (only 17 of 50 indicators have quantitative targets); future assessments should include more pressure, response, economic, social, and human health indicators; and greater emphasis should be placed on making sure that there is equivalent data coverage on both sides of the border.

“This State of the Strait report is an excellent example of translating science to practice adaptive management,” notes Robyn Thorson, Regional Director of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is honored to work collaboratively with its other U.S. and Canadian partners to produce this ground-breaking assessment that will guide better management decisions.”

“This State of the Strait report is a model for indicator reporting at a watershed level in the Great Lakes,” notes Dr. Lynda Corkum, Associate Dean of Science at University of Windsor in Windsor, Ontario, Canada and President of the International Association for Great Lakes Research. “This binational effort on science transfer for ecosystem health assessment will be a catalyst for better management.”

“Research and science are not always translated in an effective manner,” notes Dr. George M. Gray, Assistant Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Research and Development. “This indicator project is a model of effective science transfer and international cooperation.”

This indicator project and report are a product of the Canada-U.S. State of the Strait Conference held every two years to bring together government managers, researchers, students, members of environmental and conservation organizations, and concerned citizens to collaboratively assess ecosystem status and provide advice to improve research, monitoring, and management programs for the Detroit River and western Lake Erie. For a complete copy of the report titled “State of the Strait: Status and Trends of Key Indicators,” please visit the following websites:

www.stateofthestrat.org

www.epa.gov/med/grosseile_site/indicators/index.html

Key sponsors of the 2006 State of the Strait Conference and this report include: Canadian Consulate; CDM; Detroit Water and Sewerage Department; DTE Energy; Environment Canada; Environmental Management Association; Essex Region Conservation Authority; Friends of the Detroit River; Great Lakes Fishery Trust; International Joint Commission; International Wildlife Refuge Alliance; Metropolitan Affairs Coalition; Michigan Sea Grant; University of Michigan-Dearborn; University of Windsor; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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