



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

MAY 20 2008

Office of Water

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Final Report on National Meeting of Large Aquatic Ecosystem Managers and Charter for the *Council of Large Aquatic Ecosystems*

FROM: Benjamin H. Grumbles
Assistant Administrator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BHG", written over the printed name and title.

TO: Directors and Managers; Large Aquatic Ecosystems
Large Aquatic Ecosystem Meeting Participants
Office Directors; Office of Water
Water Division Directors: Regions 1 -10

The first national meeting of the managers of the Nation's large aquatic ecosystems occurred in St. Louis, Missouri in October of last year. The goal of the meeting was to begin a dialogue among managers of large aquatic ecosystems on how best to support efforts to protect these vital resources. This memorandum provides a final report of the meeting as well as a final charter for a new *Council of Large Aquatic Ecosystems* (see final report and charter attached).

EPA's new *Strategic Plan: 2006 - 2011* provides for a significantly expanded effort to protect large aquatic ecosystems as a complement to the implementation of core, national water quality programs (see Goal 4 of the *Strategic Plan*). These large ecosystem programs, ranging from Chesapeake Bay to the Puget Sound, are addressing some of the Nation's most complex water resource management challenges. The National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) published a report last year recommending "making large scale ecosystem restoration a national priority." Several other organizations have made comparable suggestions.

The first meeting of the managers of these large aquatic ecosystems provided for an initial discussion of ideas and options for supporting and strengthening these programs. Four key actions were identified at the meeting:

- Large aquatic ecosystem managers should respond to the several recent national large aquatic ecosystem reports and make recommendations to national water program managers concerning possible response actions;

- Large aquatic ecosystem program managers and national program managers should work together to communicate research priorities to the EPA Office of Research and Development and to comment on the ORD multi-year research plans related to large aquatic ecosystems;
- Large aquatic ecosystem programs need to be better integrated into Agency goal-setting, including development of the EPA *Strategic Plan*, annual program guidance, and budget; and
- Large aquatic ecosystem program managers should reconvene and develop a consortium of these programs with a clearly defined purpose.

Some of the key points made in the meeting were:

- Large aquatic ecosystem programs share fundamental principles, challenges, and needs;
- There is general interest across the programs in knowledge and experience exchange.
- Stakeholders and partners are central to the management of large aquatic ecosystem programs. While strong stakeholder efforts are evident in every program, the group acknowledged that collaboration is never done.
- Both science and data are crucial elements of support to management decisions and buy-in from every level. Technical assistance and tools need to be tailored to the end-user to the extent practicable.
- EPA leadership is required on issues not traditionally within the Office of Water or EPA purview, such as defining aquatic ecosystem research priorities related to climate change.
- The large aquatic ecosystem programs should improve their reporting on success stories and innovations.

In light of the conclusions of the meeting in St. Louis, as well as the new EPA *Strategic Plan* and several major studies, I believe it is essential that the National Water Program recognize the increasingly important role that large aquatic ecosystem programs play in meeting clean water goals. We need to support and promote implementation of these programs, facilitate communication among them, and encourage collaboration with our external partners, especially states, to help protect and restore these ecosystems. As a step toward meeting all these goals, I am today establishing a new *Council of Large Aquatic Ecosystems*, as described in the attached charter. The *Council* has five key objectives:

- Strengthen large aquatic ecosystem programs;
- Strengthen core, national water program implementation;
- Improve aquatic ecosystem program links to the EPA *Strategic Plan* and budget;
- Improve aquatic ecosystem program links to EPA research plans; and
- Develop and define new aquatic ecosystem programs as needed.

The *Council* consists of the EPA Director of each of the large aquatic ecosystem programs identified in the charter, or the designee of the Director, as well as:

- the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Water, who shall chair the *Council*;

- the Directors of the national water program offices related to aquatic ecosystems (i.e. the Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds, Office of Science and Technology, and the Office of Wastewater Management);
- a representative of the Office of Research and Development; and
- two EPA Region Water Division Directors serving two year terms on a rotating basis.

The Oceans and Coastal Protection Division within the Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds will support the operations of the *Council* including issue analysis, budgetary and financial support, and national meeting planning and coordination. A point of contact for this work will be named shortly.

Thank you for your help with this important matter.

Attachment

- Final Report of National Meeting of Large Aquatic Ecosystem Program Managers
- Charter of the *Council of Large Aquatic Ecosystems*

cc: Paul Cough
Jeff Peterson