

The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact

A Call to Order:

Citizen Actions to Support Adoption of the Great Lakes Compact in Illinois



Photo: Dan Tomaszewski, Michigan Travel Bureau

The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin
Water Resources Compact
("the Compact")

is a precedent-setting agreement
designed to protect, conserve, restore and improve
the water resources of the Great Lakes.

Containing 20 percent of the world's fresh water, the Great Lakes are a unique resource supporting a myriad of water dependent ecosystems, from wetlands and rivers to upland forests. The millions of humans, wildlife, aquatic and terrestrial flora and fauna that live in the Great Lakes Basin depend on Great Lakes water resources for drinking water, habitat, recreation, food, and commercial endeavors such as shipping and manufacturing.

This fact sheet provides a brief summary of the legislative steps that need to occur for the Compact to become legally binding, and explains how you can help.





The Legislative Process

The Compact is the result of several years of negotiation among groups including the eight Great Lakes Governors, science, policy and legal experts, representatives from state natural resource agencies, and native tribes and first nations. Advisory committees assisting the working groups reflected a broad spectrum of stakeholder interests including navigation, environmental protection, commercial fishing, and recreational boating and fishing.

For the Compact to become legally binding, it must first be adopted by all Great Lakes States, and then consented to by the U.S. Congress. As of March 2007, the Compact has been signed into law in Minnesota; Illinois, Indiana and Michigan have legislation pending; three other states plan to introduce bills during their 2007 sessions.

In January 2007, the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact (“the Compact”) was introduced in both the Illinois Senate and House. To become law, Senate Bill 50 (SB50) and House Bill 375 (HB375) must now proceed successfully through the remaining steps of the legislative process:

- After a first reading, the bill is referred to the Rules Committee
- When approved by the Rules Committee, the bill is assigned to another House/Senate committee for consideration
- After passage in the assigned committee, the bill is read a second time for consideration by the full House/Senate
- After the third reading of the bill the House/Senate votes on the bill; when passed by both the House and Senate, the Compact is then sent to the Governor
- The Compact becomes law when signed by the Governor

As SB50 and HB375 pass through the legislative process, actions from proposing amendments to raising objections and advising against bill approval are possible obstacles to Compact adoption. At these times, it is critical to communicate with your elected officials; they need to know you support Compact passage and that you expect them to support it as well. If your elected officials already support Compact adoption, let them know how much you appreciate their efforts to protect the health of the Great Lakes Basin ecosystem for Illinois residents and wildlife.

What can you do to support adoption of the Compact in Illinois?

Educate yourself about the Compact.

Information about the Compact is at your fingertips. Contact Prairie Rivers Network for

more information and for updates on the status of SB50 and HB375. Look at the Council of Great Lakes Governors' website to review and download the Compact and related documents, www.cglg.org. The Illinois General Assembly website, www.ilga.gov/, has biographies and contact information for House and Senate members, as well as a link for bill status.

Communicate with your elected officials and community.

Communicating with your legislators and others requires good timing and clear messages. When time is "of the essence," such as before a vote on the bill either by a committee or the full House or Senate, a call or email to your elected official can make the difference in how they will vote.

Your local newspaper is an excellent public forum to educate others about the importance of Compact adoption. Most people, including your



elected officials, are avid readers of the letters to the editors (LTEs) and the editorial/opinion page (op/ed). Is your newspaper covering the Compact? Have they missed an important point or fact? You can respond to a story or initiate a community dialogue with an LTE. Do you have a strong opinion you can back up by accurate facts? Do you have expertise related to environmental or other factors related to the Compact? Submit your own op/ed piece.

Whether you write a LTE or op/ed, editors like writers who

- follow the newspaper's rules for submitting LTEs and op/eds
- keep it short and simple; make one or two points maximum (especially for LTEs)
- write clearly and directly
- explain why the issue is important to the local community
- make your points with passion, but without personal attacks, sarcasm, or offensive language
- check your facts and check them again

Spread the word.

Talk to others about the need for Illinois to adopt the Compact. For more assistance and information, or to schedule a presentation for your group, contact our office at 344-2371, or email csmith@prairierivers.org.



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