



Great Lakes Regional Collaboration

GREAT LAKES REGIONAL COLLABORATION MARCH 17, 2009 PUBLIC CALL SUMMARY

1. **Call Participants:** The following members of the GLRC Executive Subcommittee, selected federal agencies, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency staff, contractors and others participated in the call.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Gary Gulezian, Macara Lousberg, Tony Kizlauskas, Ted Smith, James Schardt

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Jan Miller

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative: Dave Ullrich and Melissa Soline

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Bob Krska

National Park Service: Phyllis Ellin

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: Jennifer Day, John Iliff

U.S. Geological Survey: Leon Carl

Congressional Great Lakes Task Force: Joy Mulinex

Council of Great Lakes Governors: Lisa Wojnarowski

States: Roger Eberhardt (Michigan), Jeff Norman (Illinois)

Great Lakes Commission: Tim Eder

Stakeholders and Non-Governmental Organizations: Rich Wellman (The Nature Conservancy) Ross Powers (Michigan Loon Preservation Association), Bill Muno (Alliance for the Great Lakes), Others were on the line but not introduced.

Contractor/Call Facilitator: Tom Looby (EMA Inc.)

Contractor/ Note-taker: Maggie Clary (IEc)

2. **Welcome and Introductions**

Tom Looby (U.S. EPA Contractor and Call Facilitator) convened the call and reviewed the proposed agenda. Looby referred call participants to the GLRC web site for the agenda and other meeting materials at www.glrc.us/

Gary Gulezian (Director of U.S. EPA Great Lakes National Program Office – Welcomed participants to the continuing series of Great Lakes Stakeholders Outreach calls sponsored by the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) Executive Committee.

3. **Federal Funding Updates**

Gary Gulezian (USEPA): Gary provided an update on the status of federal funding related to the Great Lakes in three categories: the federal stimulus funding contained in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the Omnibus bill which provides funding for the rest of FY 2009, and the President's 2010 budget request, with particular highlights on elements that have significance for the Great Lakes. Gary provided an EPA perspective and then invited other federal agency representatives to summarize their highlights.

- The big boost from the federal Stimulus bill are national allocations of \$4 billion through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) and \$2 billion through the Drinking Water Fund for state wastewater and drinking water infrastructure projects, respectively. There should be significant numbers of these projects undertaken in the Great Lakes Basin. There was also \$600 million provided for Superfund and \$100 million for Brownfield redevelopment grants, a portion of which will be allocated in the Great Lakes region.

- In the FY 2009 Omnibus bill, EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO) got an increase of \$4.4 MM, most of which will go to Great Lakes Legacy Act Projects.
- The President's FY 2010 budget request has \$475 million for Great Lakes restoration that would be a multi-agency initiative with the funds originally coming into the EPA, but the initiative directs EPA to work with other agencies to accelerate the restoration of the Great Lakes. The final details of the budget are scheduled to be released April 13th. We're still in the process of working out the details.

Bob Krska- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS):

- Stimulus funding bill- the USFWS is due to receive \$290 million, most of which is allocated to restore infrastructure as well as our national fish hatcheries. Those projects will add to employment, and the restored areas will benefit from tourist visitation which will support local jobs. Right now we have 500 projects tentatively identified, which still need OMB and Congressional approval. A minor amount of funds will support some restoration projects.
- FY 2009 Omnibus bill- some increases primarily geared towards cost of living increases.

Jan Miller- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE):

- Stimulus bill: \$4.6 billion dollars nationally for a number of navigation and flood storage projects, \$2 billion of which will be for habitat restoration projects and \$200 million for environmental infrastructure projects (wastewater, sewer and combined sewer overflow projects). An announcement on the distribution of funds will come soon.
- FY 2009 Omnibus Bill: \$2.5 million for Great Lakes fishing and ecosystems work as well as habitat and wetlands funding. This should allow 2-3 construction projects to begin this year. There will be \$1.2 million in FY09 for the Great Lakes Remedial Action Plan (RAP) and Sediment Remediation program and they have 8 AOCs ready to sign agreements. Another element is \$287,000 to initiate a study to prevent inter-basin transfer of aquatic invasive species from the Mississippi River. This will be an inter-agency, inter-disciplinary study. Finally, the Corps also will receive \$17 million to construct a replacement lock at Sault Ste. Marie, MI.

Phyllis Ellin- National Park Service (NPS):

- Stimulus Bill- Nationally, \$750 million is included to support critical infrastructure facilities and trails maintenance.
- The Omnibus bill includes a 5.7% increase in the operations budget.
- The FY 2010 budget request includes a proposal for the NPS to receive \$100 million in additional funds for operation and maintenance plus \$25 million to leverage an additional \$420 million in Land Conservation funds.

John Iliff -(NOAA):

- Stimulus Bill: NOAA received \$230 million for restoration, and \$170 million is available for coastal restoration projects that are "shovel-ready." The application is on NOAA's habitat homepage: habitat.noaa.gov, in the "What's New" box. The application deadline is April 6th.
- FY 2009 Omnibus Bill: For the first time NOAA received \$1.5 million for its Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Program.

Leon Carl- (USGS):

- Stimulus bill: \$140 million for infrastructure projects that are awaiting final OMB approval. \$30 million of the \$140 million will go to three centers in the Great Lakes basin.
- FY 2009 Omnibus bill: \$1 million increase for the Great Lakes Science Center and there may be a slight increase in our beach health research budget.

Gary Gulezian: On behalf of the U.S. Forest Service

- Stimulus Bill- USFS received \$650 million for capital projects.

Questions on Budget Issues:

- Are state/local matches still required on these funding increases for restoration projects? Yes, those programs that require a match will still do so.
- Is there more money than projects or the converse? There are more projects than money.

4. Federal Legislation Update- Joy Mulinex- Great Lakes Congressional Task Force

The focus in the Congress thus far has been on the Stimulus Bill and the Omnibus Bill. They are now turning to the FY 2010 Budget Bills.

Congress is also addressing the Great Lakes Legacy Act program as part of a larger bill, the Water Quality Investment Act- HR -1262. It will propose an increase in GLLA authorizations to \$150 MM. The bill has passed the House and has been sent over to the Senate. It is likely that the Senate will have its own version of the bill and we will end up in conference about it.

Dave Ullrich noted that the SRF should have \$13.8 billion over 5 years, on a sliding scale.

5. Progress Report on Joint Initiatives:

a. Clean Beaches: Melissa Soline (Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative): For Clean Beaches we've launched Stage 2 of the effort in response to feedback that there's a real need for information on better beach management practices, especially the implementation of sanitary surveys. A working group is developing a short survey for local beach managers to compile best practices. We will be distributing the survey soon, and we hope to compile and publish the results online by the fall.

b. Aquatic Invasive Species: Jamie Schardt (US EPA): On our website we have the final report from last summer's mock rapid response exercise. The rapid response communication protocol is in place and operational.

c. Clean Boats: There are no updates to report at this time, although the information from last year is still available on the GLRC website.

d. Toxics: Ted Smith (US EPA): Mercury Phase Down- We had a limited technical review of major mercury deposition sources, we got some really good feedback and we're developing a draft strategy for the priority sectors. We're going to do another review in May, we'll revise the draft, and then release it for public comment in July, and the strategy should be final in November of 2009. **Unwanted medicines disposal-** The website continues to get thousands of visitors and we've had 10 local programs commence. We've also been in touch with DEA, which recognizes the need for policy changes to keep unwanted medicines out of the environment. **Great Lakes Sport Fish Consortium-** We've convened a panel of experts to develop a curriculum on fish consumption advisories. We have a commitment from the Harvard School of Public Health to promote these materials on their website, which may be the most utilized public health website in the country.

Frank Falat: Comment about dental amalgam- we have some new information on collections of mercury in the lines at dental offices that are not being picked up by collectors because they are too heavy. Every dental office in the country is designed that way.

Ted Smith (U.S. EPA): That was a source category as part of the Mercury Phase Down strategy. Ted is the contact for that, and can speak more with you about it offline.

e. Habitat and Wetlands- Jan Miller (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers): The Habitat/Species Work Group's Charter and Work Plan was endorsed by the Executive Committee. In the interim we've been conducting workshops in each state and one for the tribes (9 total). These workshops are an opportunity to demonstrate the completed web-based tool. The database has over 240 Great Lakes habitat projects in it, people are getting more and more interested in adding more projects. We'll be reviewing the feedback from the workshops.

f. Botulism- James Schardt (U.S. EPA): Information is on the website. Botulism is implicated in bird, fish and wildlife mortalities each year though levels were down in 2008. We recognize that addressing this problem will require many different organizations. We are moving ahead with the formation of a botulism coordination and response network. We recently did a GLIN Announce for botulism experts to join this network. More information can be found on the GLRC website, as well as contact information for our coordinator Laura Evans.

Ross Powers (Michigan Loon Preservation Association): Are you doing any research on how fast the dead birds are traveling on the surface water to the shore? I noticed there was going to be some research on lake currents, but the dead birds are on the surface and the wind pushes them faster than the currents. You ought to look at how these dead birds are traveling across and it will help show why they're all ending up on the east side of the lake. We also need quick surveillance of the birds that die out in the middle of the lake, because early detection means we can get better lab samples.

James Schardt (U.S. EPA): That is one of the potential projects that was identified, one of the challenges we are facing is trying to get control of all those variables.

6. Stakeholder Updates:

- **Roger Eberhardt (Michigan Office of the Great Lakes):** Provided a brief update on Michigan Great Lakes Plan. The Plan was finalized in January and released by Lt. Governor Cherry. Since then we've been working on implementing it as we can, with available funding. We've been working on things that don't require additional funds such as increased collaboration, efficiency, and education. We're moving ahead on these near-term actions despite the budget constraints. In the long-term we hope to utilize some Federal funds.
- **Ross Powers (Michigan Loon Preservation Association):** We have a loon watch program where we document loon nesting activities, there was some concern about documenting population declines, our data might be able to help with that. We have also come up with a beach ranger manual which describes how citizens can pick up birds for disposal and report them to officials. It could help in the development of other response manuals.
- **Tony Kizlauskas (USEPA):** Speaking on behalf of Margaret Wooster – “She wanted the participants to hear that Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper is working on a variety of GLRC initiatives, and information is available at www.bnriverkeeper.org. She recently published a book as well, each story illustrates some aspect of the GLRC agenda. Details are available at <http://sunypress.edu>.”

- **Bill Muno (Alliance for the Great Lakes):** A year or so ago a number of workgroups were working on recommendations for updating the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Can someone provide an update?
- **Gary Gulezian:** At this point the Federal agencies have formed a workgroup to take a look at the review and public comments and come up with a proposal for moving forward with the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to bring to the new Administration. We'll be making some new recommendations and presenting findings to the new political leadership.
- **Dave Ullrich:** It's my understanding that something similar is going on in Canada.
- **Gary Gulezian:** That is correct.
- **Frank Falat:** I would like to repeat my concern about mercury reduction and what we are going to do with the old system, someone needs to handle that.
- **Dave Ullrich:** There are two major Superfund cleanups moving forward, one on the Fox River, which is going to have some major clean up and the second on the Kalamazoo River. I think they both have significant Great Lakes implications and we may want to do an update in the next call.

Gary Gulezian: Thanked everyone for their participation in the call.