

Ontario and Great Lakes municipalities committed to cooperation

July 17, 2008

TORONTO - The Memorandum of Cooperation signed today by three Ontario cabinet ministers and Ontario members of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative commits the provincial government and municipalities to work closely on issues affecting the Great Lakes Basin ecosystem.

The Memorandum of Cooperation:

- Commits Ontario to receiving and considering advice and recommendations from the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative (Cities Initiative) on issues of municipal interest and responsibility in future plans and approaches to the Great Lakes Basin ecosystem under the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem (COA).
- Commits the Cities Initiative to working together with Ontario to develop mechanisms to engage the Ontario members of the Cities Initiative, as well as the broader Ontario municipal sector and providing information, advice and recommendations to Ontario regarding the COA.
- Runs until March 31, 2010, coinciding with the life of the current COA. It also commits the parties to considering ongoing communications and cooperation beyond 2010.

The COA commits Ontario and Canada to reducing pollutants, cleaning up degraded hotspots (Areas of Concern), preserving and restoring fish and wildlife habitat, and conserving the tremendous biodiversity of the Great Lakes Basin ecosystem by protecting and restoring coastal wetlands and reducing the threat of aquatic invasive species.

Included among the areas of the 2007 COA that affect municipalities is an Ontario commitment to work at reducing contaminants entering the Great Lakes from municipal sewage treatment plants, combined sewer overflows and stormwater. Ontario will also work with the federal government to develop an agreement to implement proposed federal wastewater effluent regulations and finalize a national strategy for wastewater.

The 2007 COA – the seventh agreement since 1971 – came into effect on June 25, 2007. It includes two important new areas for action – studying the impacts of climate change and protecting the Great Lakes as a source of drinking water. COA also assists the federal government in meeting its commitments under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.