



## Defining the Great Lakes Restoration Agenda December 2003 draft

As we consider policy leaders' interest in a restoration agenda for the Great Lakes Basin, the Council of Great Lakes Industries proposes a vision for the future of the Great Lakes region. We envision an economically vital region that is in harmony with its human and natural resources. It is our belief that to achieve this vision the region needs a comprehensive agenda based on the principles of sustainable development as defined by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). CGLI is an affiliate member of the WBCSD and uses the WBCSD definition of sustainable development: *forms of progress, which meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs*. There are three pillars of sustainability: economic growth, environmental protection and social equity. A sustainable development plan for the Great Lakes region looks toward the future and makes sure that our economic, social and natural resources are managed so they are available for future generations without compromising current needs.

### **Challenges**

The region faces challenges in three temporal categories: the past, the present and the future.

The legacies from the past include:

- The existence of Areas of Concern (AOCs)
- The introduction of alien invasive species
- Urban land use practices that are not sustainable
- The lack of understanding of sustainable practice needs.

Our present needs and objectives include:

- Meeting the goals of the Great Lakes BiNational Toxics Strategy
- Growing the economic base of the region including addressing the declining manufacturing output, declining employment and the actual withdrawal of some industries from the region.
- Providing incentives to those in large industry, smaller businesses and other regional entities such as communities and agriculture wishing to use environmental management systems that focus on eco-efficiency. Eco-efficiency is a management concept that links financial and environmental performance to create more value with less impact.
- Providing education and training for a skilled, diverse and adaptable workforce today that can adroitly adjust to future demands including technology advances and sustainable practices.

The future needs of our region include:

- Addressing aging community infrastructures such as combined sewer overflows and excessive non-point source run-off into Great Lakes waters.
- Transportation infrastructure issues including border crossings, high-speed rail, mass transit and highways
- Energy infrastructure issues
- Systematically addressing land use issues
- Managing our water resources in ways that enable local leadership (Governors and Premiers) to protect Great Lakes water from bulk diversion without creating economic disadvantages for in-Basin users.
- A skilled workforce and an educated and informed public about the nexus between social progress, efficiency, environmental stewardship and economic development
- Addressing the needs of population growth predicted for the Basin
- Coordinated and comprehensive economic development plan for the region.

### **Response**

These are major challenges facing the region. Some are being responded to with major, coordinated efforts. Others need to be addressed. The entire Great Lakes Basin community needs to come together with a common understanding of and support for the objectives. The leadership and involvement of a number of groups is needed. These include:

- government entities,
- environmental groups and other non-government organizations,
- industry and
- others in the basin.

### **Industry commitment**

Industry will not presume to suggest a course of action for others without bringing an understanding of what industry can – and will – do. Industry's perspective is to produce economic growth, with return on investment, while meeting the region's needs for goods and services in an environmental and socially responsible manner. In delivering on its basic purpose, industry can do its part through implementation of key elements of a sustainable development framework. These elements include:

- Corporate social responsibility – companies led by people with vision and values
- Eco-efficiency practices throughout small and large industry
- Engaging in dialogues and partnerships between industry and the region's stakeholders
- Informing consumers about practices, processes, and products.
- Using innovation in technology and process to continuously improve practices, processes and products
- Managing/encouraging and valuing change through continuing education and employee training.

It is CGLI's firm belief that industry is committed to these goals and to the goals set forth in its relationships with owners – shareholders and investors – and with its employees.

### **Societal commitment**

Industry's sustainable development actions can only take place in a context that includes contributions from other sectors of society. Industry's role in society is to provide the primary employment/economic driver and as innovator. But industry cannot do it alone. For instance, Governments have a critical leadership responsibility and must provide a key element in the framework for sustainable development: good governance. Governments can:

- Execute policies for the region that value jobs and economic development in the region.
- Maintain control as local as possible.
- Use existing agencies instead of creating new entities and through these agencies create more integrated programs and minimize duplication and bureaucratic burden.
- De-evolve those governance structures that act as an impediment to the attainment of economic growth, environmental protection and social equity.
- Recognize progress made both in reducing environmental impacts and in our ability to understand and manage risks when reviewing, revising, writing and establishing Great Lakes policies and programs like the visionary objectives in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and other Basin policy documents.
- Establish priorities and clear ecosystem, risk-based objectives and engage affected stakeholders in setting these objectives.
- Develop data collection capabilities and processes that enable us to know where we are currently, utilize existing/develop new indicators and support the use of the indicators to assess progress.
- Encourage industrial development and innovation. Establish policies designed to eliminate economic disadvantages to growing businesses within the Region and promote economic development for the future. Recognize and reward leadership in sustainable development and innovative business approaches.
- Encourage use of practices that will meet the environmental, economic and social needs of the region throughout all the region's activities.

To attain a sustainable Region the following steps forward are needed:

- Governments must work with all stakeholders to address the issues in each of the three categories facing our region: ecological balance; economic growth; and social progress.
- The region needs a plan that will analyze where resources of money and effort can be best applied for the most effective sustainable outcome.

- Two operating principles need to be applied in implementing a plan. One principle, already used effectively in the economic aspects of sustainable development, is risk assessment and risk management. Risk management and risk assessment must also be applied to the environmental and social elements of sustainable development policy so that we are working on problems that represent threats objectively determined. The second principle is to establish clear goals, objectives and timetables to address all future issues under the plan.