



## **Mayors, Businesses and NGOs in Ottawa to call for increased investment to protect the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence** ***GLRI-type process proposed to Environment and Climate Change Minister***

Ottawa, ON November 22, 2017 – Today, mayors, businesses and NGOs gathered in Ottawa to call for a collaborative process to amplify and accelerate Great Lakes and St. Lawrence protection and restoration, at their second annual Parliament Hill Days. The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence advocates requested that Environment and Climate Change Minister Catherine McKenna establish an Independent Panel of Stakeholders to undertake a strategic review of federal Great Lakes and St. Lawrence investments and programs with a view to increasing investment and improving programming to protect the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence.

“Despite years of effort by all levels of government, we are not keeping up with the compounding stressors and new threats to the Great Lakes,” said Tony Maas, of Freshwater Future, “We need to up our game to combat the impacts of climate change, agricultural and urban run-off, new chemicals, invasive species and habitat loss.”

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, Freshwater Future, Council of the Great Lakes Region, Strategies Saint Laurent and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and other key stakeholders met with Minister of Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna while in Ottawa, to propose a Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Collaborative Strategy to find ways to accelerate and amplify the impact of investments and programs to protect and restore the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence.

“We are inspired by the success of the US Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which demonstrated how federal commitment and financing transformed the shorelines and communities of the Great Lakes,” said Paul Dyster, Mayor of Niagara Falls New York and Chair of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, a binational coalition of mayors. “We are committed to working together to achieve the same success here in Canada”.

The groups are proposing the creation of an Independent Panel of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Stakeholders to undertake a strategic review of federal programs and investments to better support the existing Structural Programs, such as the St. Lawrence Action Plan and the ZIP Program, to meet commitments and priorities identified under existing Great Lakes and St. Lawrence intergovernmental agreements and plans. The Independent Panel would then consult with stakeholders on recommended investments and programming to address the priorities effectively. Given their critical stake in Great Lakes and St. Lawrence management, the Governments of Québec and Ontario and First Nations and Metis political leadership would also be asked to participate in this process.

“A healthy Great Lakes St. Lawrence Region is essential for the success of the Canadian economy, said Mark Fisher, President and CEO of the Council of the Great Lakes Region. “Our global competitiveness and our ability to attract talent rests on protecting our greatest asset – our high quality of life on the shores of the greatest freshwater resource in the world.”

The connection between the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence as one ecoregion is of particular interest to the Collaborative partners. There is currently no plan that tackles the greatest threats to both systems, particularly the risk of introducing Asian carp into the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes system via Lake Michigan.

“The waters of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence play a critical role in sustaining the health of one-fifth of all fish species in North America, said Robert Lambe, Executive Director of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. “Asian carp pose an existential threat to indigenous fish and recreational and commercial fishing in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence.”

For more information on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Collaborative Strategy, please go to [www.glslcities.org/collaborative](http://www.glslcities.org/collaborative).

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