



# Water Infrastructure and Clean Water State Revolving Fund

## Regional Priorities for the Great Lakes

March 2007

### Background on the Issue

Wastewater discharges to the Great Lakes date back to the earliest human settlements on the shores and tributaries. As populations expanded, the problems intensified. The estimated volume of combined sewer overflow (CSO) discharges in the U.S. is 850 billion gallons per year, with most of these CSOs located in the Great Lakes and Northeast regions. Even though cities installed wastewater controls through the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the primary treatment provided did not solve the problem. It was only in the latter half of the century that secondary and, in some cases, advanced tertiary treatment was provided. Even with that, most of the sewers continued to combine waste water and storm water. With increased urbanization, the capacity of the sewer systems and treatment plants was insufficient to handle both flows and, as a result, billions of gallons of untreated sewage continue to enter the Great Lakes annually. The discharges contain not only the conventional biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and suspended solids, but also pathogens and many toxic chemicals.



### Congressional Priorities for Water Quality and Infrastructure

Congress has the opportunity to address this problem by fully funding the existing Clean Water State Revolving Fund authorization at \$1.35 billion. These funds, when combined with state financing, provide long term, low-interest loans to cities and sanitary districts to fund projects to manage waste water and storm water. Because the need across the Great Lakes Basin is so significant, Congress should look at a larger authorization in the future.

#### *This fact sheet prepared by the Great Lakes Commission*

The Great Lakes Commission is an interstate compact agency that works on behalf of the eight Great Lakes states to advance restoration, protection and sound management of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin.

#### **Contacts:**

Tim Eder, Executive Director,

[teder@glc.org](mailto:teder@glc.org)

Jon MacDonagh-Dumler,

Government Affairs,

[jonmacd@glc.org](mailto:jonmacd@glc.org)



Great Lakes Commission  
Eisenhower Corporate Park  
2805 S. Industrial Hwy., #100  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104-6791  
734-971-9135 • 734-971-9150 (fax)  
[www.glc.org](http://www.glc.org)

### Funding History and Committee Jurisdiction

Congress provided more than \$60 billion in grants for waste water conveyance and treatment between 1972 and 1986. Since then, over \$50 billion of combined federal and state money in low-interest loans has been available for this work. The primary jurisdiction in the House is the Water Resources and Environment Committee of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. In the Senate, the Environment and Public Works Committee is the key.

### Progress to Date

Tremendous progress has been made, especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the installation of secondary treatment on nearly all facilities and tertiary treatment on some. Not only were loadings of BOD and suspended solids reduced by 85-90 percent and greater, but phosphorus discharges also decreased dramatically. With improved pre-treatment programs, toxic discharges declined, as well. The area showing the least progress is CSO discharges, which continue to adversely affect the lakes across the basin. Some cities are making progress in controlling these discharges, but much remains to be done.

### Benefits to the Great Lakes Region

Substantial reduction of the discharge of untreated sewage into the Great Lakes will reduce health risks for bathers and bacteria in drinking water. Given the potential impact on

human health, overflows of untreated human and industrial waste into Great Lakes waters must be controlled through comprehensive solutions that may include structural controls such as separating storm and sanitary sewers, constructing storage capacity or controlling infiltration/inflow; non-structural controls such as land use planning and aggressive use of best management practices to allow no net increase in storm water run-off; and regulatory controls such as issuing, updating and enforcing National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits.

## **Links for More Information**

**Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes (Coastal Health):**

[www.glrc.us/strategy.html](http://www.glrc.us/strategy.html)