



**Statewide Public Advisory Council**

# **Press Advisory**

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## **Community celebrates toxic cleanup and calls for continued Great Lakes restoration funding**

### **Federal support needed to maintain progress in cleaning up Great Lakes "toxic hot spots"**

**Muskegon, Mich.** – Efforts to clean up Great Lakes "toxic hot spots" are making progress, but require continued federal support for state and local restoration programs. This is the "take-home message" being conveyed today by a statewide coalition working to clean up Michigan's 14 Great Lakes Areas of Concern. Leaders from the group joined with federal, state and local officials to celebrate the completion of the Ruddiman Creek contaminated sediment cleanup on Muskegon Lake, one of Michigan's 14 Areas of Concern designated under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. The cleanup was funded by the federal Great Lakes Legacy Act and Michigan's Clean Michigan Initiative environmental bond program. (The ceremony takes place on Monday, May 15 at 2:00 p.m. on Ruddiman pond on McGraft Park Road off of Lakeshore Drive in Muskegon.)

"This is an important success for the people of Muskegon and we should recognize and celebrate the progress we are making in cleaning up Muskegon Lake, and the Great Lakes in general," said Greg Mund, chair of the Statewide Public Advisory Council for Michigan's Areas of Concern Program. "Our success on Muskegon Lake shows that we can get this job done, but we need the federal government's continued support. We've had it here and it produced success. We need to maintain it so we can successfully clean up all of the Areas of Concern on the Great Lakes."

Community leaders involved in the Ruddiman Creek cleanup emphasized that it took years of hard work to get to the point where the actual cleanup project was ready for implementation. "Long before the Legacy Act was signed into law we were putting the building blocks in place that made the Ruddiman Creek cleanup possible," said Theresa Bernhardt, chair of the Ruddiman Creek Task Force, a subcommittee of the Muskegon Lake Public Advisory Council that spearheaded efforts to design and fund the cleanup project. "We identified the toxic site, analyzed the sediments, outlined the scope of the cleanup, and worked with state and federal agencies to make it happen," Bernhardt added. She emphasized that "while the Legacy Act got the cleanup off the ground, our work over many years was critical to understanding where the pollution was and what we needed to do to clean it up."

Support for such efforts is at risk under President Bush's proposed 2007 budget. While the president's budget would increase funds for actual cleanups under the Great Lakes Legacy Act, it reduces funding available for the preliminary work that must be conducted before such cleanups can begin.

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The President's budget would cut funding for U.S. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office, which oversees the Areas of Concern program and administers federal funds for state and local restoration efforts. If implemented by Congress, this cutback will restrict the ability of states and local communities to identify toxic sites and prepare cleanup plans for them.

After declining in the late 1990s, Congress increased funding over the last two years for the states and local communities to implement restoration efforts in the Areas of Concern. With this increased funding, Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality was able to double the staff support devoted to cleaning up Michigan's 14 Areas of Concern.

"The cleanup process is like a three-legged stool: it requires federal funding for state and local efforts; state leadership in guiding cleanup efforts; and local support and coordination," said Kathy Evans, long-time coordinator of the Muskegon Lake Public Advisory Council and former chair of the Statewide Public Advisory Council. "While funding for the Legacy Act is critical, the other legs of the stool must also be in place for it to succeed."

The proposed funding cuts to U.S. EPA's Great Lakes program are directly contrary to the recommendations of the *Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes*. Released in December 2005, the strategy was developed in response to President Bush's May 2004 executive order on the Great Lakes and reflects the consensus of more than 1,500 leaders from across the Great Lakes region. Among its recommendations for the Areas of Concern, the strategy calls for \$10 million annually for the Great Lakes states and local advisory councils and \$1.7 million annually for U.S. EPA. The strategy states that "current funding levels should be enhanced ... to ensure adequate technical capacity at the federal, state, local and tribal levels so that large-scale cleanup programs, such as the Great Lakes Legacy Act, are utilized effectively."

Greg Mund, chair of the statewide council, noted that "the President and Congress appear to be stepping back from their commitment to the Great Lakes at the very moment that we have come together as a region with a comprehensive restoration strategy for the lakes." Mund added that "we need to replicate our success on Muskegon Lake in Michigan's other 13 Areas of Concern. Our work isn't done, and Congress needs to continue supporting the federal, state and local efforts that made this cleanup possible."

The Ruddiman Creek cleanup was funded with \$8.8 million from the Great Lakes Legacy Act and \$4.7 million from Michigan's Clean Michigan Initiative environmental bond program. The project is removing approximately 90,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediments from Ruddiman Creek and pond. It is the third cleanup completed under the Great Lakes Legacy Act, following successful cleanups of sites on the Detroit River in Michigan and the St. Louis River in Minnesota.

In her remarks, Theresa Bernhardt called the Ruddiman Creek cleanup celebration a "teachable moment" on how to successfully clean up a Great Lakes "toxic hot spot." In this spirit, she concluded with a homework assignment for the Congressional representatives in attendance: "when you go back to Washington, take what you've learned today and make sure Congress provides the resources that we need to replicate the success we are celebrating today elsewhere on Muskegon Lake, and in the other toxic hot spots around the Great Lakes."

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*The Statewide Public Advisory Council is a coalition of local advisory councils that are guiding restoration efforts in Michigan's 14 Areas of Concern (AOC) designated under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. The council was formed in 1991 to facilitate public participation in decisions affecting Michigan's statewide AOC program, heighten public awareness of and participation in cleanup efforts, and generate public support for restoration and protection measures in the AOCs. The Council provides training and technical assistance to AOC participants and advises state and federal agencies and elected officials on priorities for the statewide AOC program. Technical support for the Council is provided by the Great Lakes Commission. Background on Michigan's Great Lakes Areas of Concern is available from the Statewide Public Advisory Council's website at <http://www.glc.org/spac>.*