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League of Women Voters of Michigan: Great Lakes Ecosystem

Adopted 1974, 1981; title amended 1985, Great Lakes Diversions and Consumptive Uses Position and Great Lakes System Position combined 1988; updated 2005

The League of Women Voters of Michigan supports preserving and enhancing the environmental integrity and quality of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Ecosystem. We support the attainment and maintenance of high water quality standards throughout the Great Lakes Basin, with emphasis on water pollution prevention. Water conservation should be a high priority of all governments in the Basin.

I. Protective Measures

To achieve protection and improvement of this valuable, international resource, the League of Women Voters of Michigan supports efforts to:

- A. Limit uses of "fragile," historical, cultural and scenic shoreline areas.
- B. Preserve wild and pristine areas within the watershed, with no new development in these special habitats without adherence to strict criteria as prescribed by federal, state, or local governments.
- C. Provide for appropriate recreational opportunities in and public access to sensitive areas without destruction or harm to the ecosystem.
- D. Protect the quality of the air and waters of the ecosystem by strict adherence to agricultural, industrial, residential, environmental, and commercial zoning regulations that prohibit the introduction of toxic or polluting discharges or detrimental land use techniques within the Basin.
- E. Protect the remaining dune formations. Enforce strict regulations of sand dune mining or development on the dunes.
- F. Strengthen upstream land management to eliminate sources of siltation and pollution.
- G. Control the invasion and spread of non-native aquatic and terrestrial nuisance species.

II. Threats to the Ecosystem

The League of Women Voters of Michigan opposes the following activities as they can lead to the degradation of the special natural resources of the Great Lakes Ecosystem:

- A. Inefficient or excessive water uses. Proposals for new or increased withdrawals within the Basin, e.g. for agricultural or municipal uses, should be carefully evaluated before being permitted. Withdrawals should be regularly monitored for potential or actual damage to the ecosystem.
- B. Destruction of marshes and other wetlands throughout the watershed. Mitigation should be accepted only as a last resort. Mitigation proposals should be rigorously evaluated and projects should be strictly monitored to assure no net loss to the ecosystem.
- C. New or increased diversions or transfers by any means of Great Lakes waters and adjacent groundwaters to a place outside the Basin. Projects already in place should be carefully monitored and restricted if there is evidence of damage to the ecosystem.
- D. Dredging and filling of river inlets, harbors, lakes or wetlands except for tightly-controlled, non-degrading and non-repetitive activities.

E. Discharge to air or water of toxic pollutants and other material from industrial, agricultural, residential or commercial operations that may damage the ecosystem in violation of laws and ordinances.

III. Public Participation

The League of Women Voters of Michigan supports informed and responsible action on behalf of the preservation of the Great Lakes Ecosystem. Relevant information should be readily available to the public. Opportunities for public input should be timely, accessible, convenient and well advertised.

IV. Role of Government

The League of Women Voters of Michigan supports:

A. Coordination of functions among various governmental agencies charged with protecting the Great Lakes and elimination of unnecessary overlap.

B. Use of area-wide coordinated management plans and techniques in the solving of Great Lakes Ecosystem problems.

C. Participation by all affected governments in the Basin in review and decision-making on Great Lakes agreements and projects, facilitated in open meetings and hearings.

D. Strengthening of existing mechanisms for intergovernmental discussions and decision-making.

E. Separation of responsibility for submitting recommendations for governmental projects from issuing permits for such projects.

F. Monitoring and enforcement of treaties, ordinances, laws and master plans.

V. Research Priorities

The League of Women Voters of Michigan believes that research on Great Lakes issues should focus on:

A. Effective, non-toxic control and removal of invasive aquatic and terrestrial species.

B. Restoration of health to the overall resource.

C. Survival of native aquatic and terrestrial species and their nutrient sources.

D. Continual testing of Great Lakes water quality for impact from the following: pesticides and fertilizers, resistant bacteria, persistent pharmaceuticals and other chemicals.

E. Evaluation of water accountability systems, groundwater monitoring and water use planning and conservation efforts throughout the Basin.