

**Alliance for the Great Lakes
Biodiversity Project
Canadian Environmental Law Association
Concerned Citizens of Newport
Environmental Association for Great Lakes Education
Environmental Advocates of New York
Erie County Environmental Coalition
Georgian Bay Association
Great Lakes Aquatic Habitat Network and Fund
Great Lakes United
Lake Erie Region Conservancy
Minnesota Environmental Partnership
Nature Quebec
Ohio Environmental Council
Pollution Probe
Save the River!
Sierra Club of Canada
Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council**

P R E S S R E L E A S E

A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION FOR GREAT LAKES PROTECTION

November 22, 2005 – Environmental groups from across Canada and the United states are calling two proposed water agreements between the eight Great Lakes states and two provinces an improvement over current law in protecting the Great Lakes from water diversions and misuse. “At a time when relations over trade and foreign policy are strained” said Derek Stack, Executive Director of Great Lakes United, “these agreements demonstrate the neighbourly cooperation and environmental stewardship needed to protect the world’s largest freshwater ecosystem, and the quality of life it provides to the 42 million people who live in region.”

Pipelines that would export water from the lakes and companies that abuse water resources here in the region threaten our future. The Agreements include several measures to ensure a viable plan for the long-term protection and sound management of our Great Lakes water, including a prohibition of bulk water diversions over long distances; the inclusion of ground, stream, river and lake waters; scrutiny of withdrawal proposals for potential harm to the environment; and the requirement that the provinces and states institute water conservation programs. Noting that future negotiating conditions may not be favorable to a general prohibition on diversions the Canadian Environmental Law Association’s Sarah Miller said: “the Agreements’ prohibition on most out-of-basin withdrawals sends a strong message to those looking to the Great Lakes for future water supplies that they need to start making alternative

plans.” Cam Davis, the Executive Director of the Alliance for the Great Lakes, called the Great Lakes “a Global Treasure” and said the Agreements show they “are not for sale to the highest bidder”

The groups did express disappointment that the Agreements may allow for diversions based on the political boundaries of straddling-counties rather using the hydrological boundaries of the basin. They were also concerned that the Precautionary Principle of acting protectively before harm is proven was not fully integrated into the Agreements and that the Agreements do almost nothing to prevent export of bottled water from the basin. The groups urged the governors and premiers to strengthen those areas before finally signing the Agreements in December. Said Sierra Club of Canada Executive Director Elizabeth May, “these Agreements respect the role of the International Joint Commission in opposing damaging diversions, and include commitments to substantially improve bi-national collaboration in reviewing diversion proposals and developing conservation plans. The final language raises a number of concerns, particularly in relation to bottled water, but overall the Agreements are an advance on the status quo.”

The groups also commended provisions for public participation in water withdrawal approval processes(including increases in amounts withdrawn for bottling); the basing of the agreements in the governments’ “public trust” and “duty to protect” responsibilities; and preserving the rights of the individual states and provinces to enact stronger protection as needed. A five-year review process that includes cumulative impact assessments of new water withdrawals and the potential impacts of climate change on water levels was also noted as step in the right direction.

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