

## SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

# The Great Lakes Project Meeting on Mackinac Island, June 1-2, 2008

### Executive Summary

An unprecedented gathering of The Great Nature Conservancy's leadership convened on Mackinac Island, Michigan in June 2008 to launch and commit to the goals and objectives of the Great Lakes Project. The Great Lakes Project is a global priority of the organization's Campaign for a Sustainable Planet, designed to help advance the 2015 goal and embody our commitment to help make the Great Lakes Basin among the best managed ecosystems in the world and generate internal and external collaboration to leverage conservation across the Basin.

Over 225 leaders were present from each of the 8 Great Lakes States and Canada, including 100 board of trustees members state directors, Board of Directors Chair John Morgridge and Director Georgia Wells, new President & CEO Mark Tercek, the Conservancy's Executive Team, and John Lounds, President, and senior staff and board members from Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Building on a day and a half of discussion forums on Great Lakes issues and strategies, the meeting culminated in attendees signing a *Pledge of Action, Collaboration and Support* committing the organization to advancing the goals of the Project. Important new governing structures, management tools, and projects were introduced and launched at the Mackinac Island meeting as well, to facilitate immediate next steps and implementation of the Great Lakes Project. And, those present raised many challenging questions and issues that must be addressed in the future if we are to be successful.

Below is an overview of the governing structure, forums, pledge of commitment, and important questions and challenges raised in discussion at the Mackinac meeting. Trustees and staff are encouraged to visit [nature.org/mackinac](http://nature.org/mackinac) where copies of the background materials, governing documents, and overview and vision for the Great Lakes Project can be found.

As a next step, trustees and state directors of the Great Lakes states made a commitment to convene again in Vancouver in October 2008 at the ConEx meeting. This follow-up meeting is scheduled for the evening of October 14, 2008, including dinner and discussions, at which time a progress report will be shared on the Great Lakes Project. An interim report will be distributed to trustees and staff in late summer, followed by advanced reading materials for the Vancouver meeting. These materials will also be available at the website.

## **Governance and Leadership of the Great Lakes Project**

The Great Lakes Project is a “One Conservancy” effort among our 8 state programs within the Great Lakes Basin and a close collaboration with Nature Conservancy of Canada. At the Mackinac Island meeting, a newly chartered Great Lakes Board was launched, (including Eastern and Central Regional Directors, state directors from each of the 8 Great Lakes states, representatives from the board’s four designated teams in conservation, policy, philanthropy, and finance, and ex-officio representation from Nature Conservancy of Canada). Helen Taylor, State Director – Michigan, chairs the Board. The members of the four teams reporting to the Great Lakes Board, Conservation, Policy, Philanthropy and Finance, will include staff from the state programs across the Basin.

A copy of the charter of the new Board is available at [nature.org/mackinac](http://nature.org/mackinac).

## **Forum Sessions**

Forum sessions were held on key strategies and issues facing the Great Lakes and The Nature Conservancy in its efforts to move forward with the Great Lakes Project. Advance papers and executive summaries were made available to all attendees, and provided on CD at the conference. In addition, the website [nature.org/mackinac](http://nature.org/mackinac) includes the advance papers, biographies of presenters, and copies of the actual presentations made on the following topics:

- A New Approach: Lake Basin Planning, Examples from Lake Ontario & Green Bay
- Effective Great Lakes Conservation: A Policy Perspective
- A Shared Canada-U.S. Vision of Conservation Success for the Great Lakes
- Leading With Science: The Thirst for Knowledge & Leverage
- Aquatic Invasive Species: Problems with Solutions
- Protecting Migratory Birds in the Great Lakes Region
- Confronting Climate Change in the Great Lakes Region

Each of the forum sessions included open discussion where key questions were raised by trustees. Highlights from discussion sessions are below. Many of these questions and issues raised highlight topics requiring further inquiry and exploration for the future.

- Who are the key partners in these strategies?
- How does water quality (e.g., sewer overflow) issues fit with our priorities?
- Will the Conservancy be involved in steering appropriations to issues like remediation and clean-up of contamination in the Great Lakes?
- How do we operate on different scales and have impact? What is the link between Lake Ontario and a large bay in Lake Michigan?
- How do we know that wetlands we are protecting today will be wetlands in the future? We need more climate change modeling, map of lake floor, etc.
- How will the government relations staff from each state work together to create one common voice and set of messages for the Great Lakes?
- Trustees need talking points. The science is the anchor of being non-confrontational and trustees need help in translating the Conservancy’s work.
- The Nature Conservancy needs to communicate its science results more effectively.

- There are a number of academic researchers working on aquatic invasive species, and a key role for the Conservancy would be to bring a more integrated approach and coordination to the work among researchers.
- What does conservation at scale mean in reference to coastal systems?
- How does wind energy relate to the Conservancy's work—both migratory birds and other species and habitat?

## **Closing Session and Results**

The trustee-led closing session was, by all accounts, an extraordinary and high-energy exchange in which all participants came together to endorse the vision of the Great Lakes Project and commit to a new level of collaboration to achieve the goals and objectives of the Project. The chairs of the boards of trustees were seated up front, and two Michigan trustees, Rick Snyder and Bill Parfet, facilitated the session. By the end of the session, people came forward to sign their name to the pledge below:

### **A Pledge of Action, Collaboration and Support by the Leadership of The Nature Conservancy's Great Lakes State Programs**

As leaders of The Nature Conservancy state programs on the Great Lakes, we understand and pledge our support for the vision for Great Lakes conservation discussed at this unprecedented gathering.

The Great Lakes are a globally significant freshwater resource that makes our efforts a conservation imperative. We are leading a priority project of the Campaign for a Sustainable Planet that is critical to the attainment of The Nature Conservancy's 2015 goal. We fully embrace this opportunity to contribute to the organization's global vision and needed solutions for freshwater conservation around the world.

Our objective is to assure a healthy and resilient Great Lakes ecosystem where the connection between natural systems and the quality of human life is understood and valued. By working with partners we will assure the Great Lakes are among the best managed ecosystems in the world.

We are compelled by this objective to undertake an ambitious new collaborative effort. Building upon The Nature Conservancy's long history, its traditions and site-based conservation successes through state-based programs, we will reach for a new model characterized by a shared and understood vision, a commitment to co-investment, new levels of coordination and integration across boundaries, and sharing and deploying our skills and staff.

The following principles will guide the leadership of the Great Lakes state programs in their actions:

- **The mission and 2015 goal of The Nature Conservancy;**
- **The Core Values of The Nature Conservancy: Integrity Beyond Reproach; One Conservancy; Respect for People, Communities and Cultures; Commitment to Diversity; and Tangible Lasting Results.**

- **Partnerships that achieve greater leverage of the Conservancy's and partners' unique ability to contribute to Great Lakes and freshwater conservation around the world;**
- **Effective, high-leverage, and efficient use of resources, particularly financial and human resources; and**
- **Transparency in planning and decision-making.**

Defined and bound by one of the largest freshwater ecosystems in the world, our programs face a tremendous challenge and bi-national opportunity, with partners, to continue to fulfill the Conservancy's unique niche of innovation, science, and market-based strategies. With five Great Lakes, two countries, and one chance to find a more effective path forward to protect one of the world's priorities, we collectively make our pledge and commitment of leadership and resources to fulfill this vision, and to leverage our capabilities and support beyond the Great Lakes to the Conservancy's freshwater work globally.

While the closing session resulted in the signing of this commitment, it also was an opportunity for trustees to identify the challenges we face in achieving the goals and vision of the Great Lakes Project. Issues and challenges raised by trustees during this session focused on:

- The involvement of trustees in the Great Lakes Project is imperative. The state directors must develop an effective means of engaging and involving trustees in the Great Lakes work ahead.
- A critical next step also will be to develop mechanisms for trustees to communicate with one another across the Great Lakes Project, and to talk out issues with one another.
- Measures will be important to develop for the Great Lakes Project—a “dashboard” with real measures based on fact and science as well as programmatic progress would be a effective tool.
- We will face major opportunities with major costs—we will need to redirect funding and resources, keeping track of the long-term objectives, not cause(s) of the day.
- Partnership will be key to our success, and The Nature Conservancy needs to challenge itself to learn more about true partnership—not partnership on our terms, but true co-creation and shared goals.
- The legislative challenges are big, for there are too few resources and capacity dedicated towards Great Lakes issues. Policy will be key to assuring future outcomes.
- Resources will be critical to carry the vision forward. It will be important to coordinate our efforts effectively to secure the support needed for this exciting new vision. It was suggested that we pick projects like Northwest Lake Superior Coast (Trout Bay) project that we all can get behind—ones that are tangible, visible, and collaborative. Voted #1 quote of the closing session: “I’m going to give until it hurts, and then I’m going to give some more until it feels good again,” Bill Parfet, Michigan trustee and closing session co-leader.

## **Next Steps**

While much was accomplished, in many ways, our work is only beginning. Building on a tremendous foundation of existing work in the Great Lakes, we now have a powerful new platform to build from—with leadership, commitment and teams in place already delivering results, and working hard to frame next steps where there are gaps. We are taking the input of trustees and participants seriously, and incorporating it into the next steps of the Great Lakes Project, and we will be reporting early results in an interim report by the end of summer. In October, when trustees and senior staff from the Great Lakes convene in Vancouver, we will provide a new report of progress to date, and key milestones ahead.

