



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment**

**TESTIMONY OF
The Honorable Gary Becker**

**Mayor, City of Racine, Wisconsin
and Vice Chair, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative**

**March 7, 2007
Washington, D.C.**

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Good afternoon Madam Chairwoman and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Gary Becker and I am the Mayor of Racine, Wisconsin. I also serve as Vice Chair of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, a coalition of mayors from 39 member cities and 50 participating cities from the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence region in the United States and Canada. Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago is our Founding Chair and Mayor David Miller of Toronto is our current Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Great Lakes Mayors are extremely fortunate to be managing cities and towns located along a resource as incredible as the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes bring tremendous local and regional benefits in terms of economic development, trade, recreation, tourism and drinking water. At the same time, however, Great Lakes Mayors must deal with the problems of the Great Lakes on a daily basis. Whether it is making sure the water intakes are clear from zebra mussels, dealing with beach closings and unreliable water quality standards, operating wastewater treatment plants properly, or managing storm water, the people who work for me, just like those for all the other mayors across the basin, must make sure things are done right 24/7. These are very real issues for me, my fellow mayors, and the people who live in our cities.

Invasive species are a key issue for Great Lakes Mayors, causing extensive biological damage and resulting in billions of dollars of costs across the country and in the Great Lakes Basin. Over 180 different species have come in to the Great Lakes already, and they continue to arrive at the rate of one every six or seven months. Some of the most notable are the sea lamprey and zebra mussels.

Others very close to entering the Great Lakes are several varieties of Asian carp, already in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship canal less than 50 miles from Lake Michigan. Ballast water in ships is the most common pathway for entry into the system.

Cities have dealt with the zebra mussel problem for many years, with the clogging of drinking water intake structures being the primary concern. In my own City of Racine, we spent almost \$1.4 million in 1995 for a new chemical feed system, chemical lines, and diffusers to address the situation. In operating expenses for chemicals and energy to fight the zebra mussels, the Racine Water Utility spends \$30,000 to \$40,000 annually.

The tragedy of this situation is that much of the invasive species problem could have been prevented. If action is not taken quickly, things will get worse. Many of the issues we deal with on the Great Lakes are the result of mistakes we made in the past, and now must pay the price. Rarely do we have the opportunity to prevent future damage by taking action now. This is one situation where we have that opportunity, and it would be a mistake not to take full advantage of it.

Comprehensive invasive species legislation on a national level is essential if we want to deal with the problem effectively. In fact, it is something we need to coordinate closely with our Canadian neighbors and make sure coverage includes the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence. It also needs to be done with full awareness of the actions recently taken by the International Maritime Organization. This legislation was introduced in earlier years, and never advanced to passage. This must be the year for action.

This legislation does not need to cost taxpayers a large amount of money. In fact, the lack of strong laws is costing the taxpayers much more already. The Federal government needs a strong program to restrict ballast water discharges and control the other pathways for invasive species. Costs incurred in controlling the flow of invasive species should be absorbed by the responsible businesses and the consumers of the products they produce and transport.

An additional problem with not having comprehensive federal laws is that states and local governments are finding it necessary to move ahead with their own efforts. The State of Michigan took a strong leadership role by passing legislation and implementing a program that took effect this year. Other states are also considering programs. Having a program in one of the Great Lakes states, and potentially different programs in others, will cause problems for states and for the shipping industry. The vast amount of legislative, administrative, and business time spent to deal with this could be avoided with strong Federal legislation.

Chicago has passed an ordinance to prohibit the sale of live Asian carp as another means of dealing with the problem. Although this is helpful, it cannot solve the problem we are facing with invasive species on a broader scale.

One other action by Congress needed in the very near term is authorization and appropriations to complete construction and fund operation of the electronic barrier on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal to keep Asian carp out the Great Lakes.

Mayors, and many others in the Great Lakes region, such as Governors, business groups, environmental organizations, and members of Congress, wish this could have been done several years ago. Each day it is not completed perpetuates the unnecessary risk to the multi-billion dollar sport and commercial fishing industry on the Great Lakes.

In addition to passing comprehensive federal invasive species legislation, the Federal government could be doing more with legislation and regulations on the books already. In particular, the U.S. Department of Interior has authority under the Lacey Act to restrict the shipments of injurious species to prevent the expansion of a problem. The Interior Department has had petitions for listing the black, bighead, and silver carp for a number of years, and only recently proposed the listing of one of the species. Congress even considered legislation last year because of the lack of action by the Department of Interior. Mayors ask for your assistance in making sure that the Interior Department takes action promptly to list all three species as injurious.

The U.S. Coast Guard has regulations on ballast water that should be enforced strictly. With the expanded homeland security responsibilities of the Coast Guard, it is not clear whether they have sufficient resources to do this, or whether it is treated as a high enough priority. We would like to work with the Coast Guard to see what further actions might be possible.

Although the focus of today's hearing is on invasive species, it is important to recognize that there are many other serious threats to the Great Lakes. Discharges of untreated or inadequately treated sewage from combined and sanitary sewer overflows are a major problem across the Basin. The infrastructure investments needed are in the billions of dollars, and only with significantly increased investments by Federal, state, and local governments will this problem be solved.

Great Lakes Mayors appreciate the recent action by this Subcommittee and the full Committee to advance three key water infrastructure bills (H.R. 569, H.R. 700 and H.R. 720). We are hopeful that the House will pass these bills.

Other key issues highlighted in the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy, which the Great Lakes region perceives as the blueprint for moving forward, were toxics, habitat and wetland protection, and contaminated sediments. These are the priority issues from the perspective of the Great Lakes Mayors.

The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy of December 2005 did an excellent job of identifying the top priority problems on the Great Lakes and setting out the actions needed to solve them. Although some progress has been made under the Strategy, we need to accomplish much more. It is going to take a significant increase in time, management attention, and financial resources by all parties before we can advance in ways that will truly protect and restore the Great Lakes for future generations.

Thank you for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.