TESTIMONY OF
REPRESENTATIVE MARK S. KIRK (IL-10)
BEFORE THE U.S HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
JANUARY 23, 2008

Thank you Madame Chairman for allowing me to testify this afternoon at this critical hearing on Great Lakes water quality. I am here today because one of our most precious natural resources is under siege. As the world's largest freshwater system, the Great Lakes provide food, recreation, and drinking water for nearly 40 million people. Yet our water is greatly polluted.

Nearly 24 billion gallons of municipal sewage are dumped into the Great Lakes each year. While cities like Milwaukee have begun to reduce the amounts of sewage they discharge, not enough is being done to terminate this harmful practice. Detroit, for example, dumps 13.2 billion gallons of sewage per year into the lakes. This has a devastating effect on the region's tourism sector. Studies estimate an economic loss of roughly $8,000 per day as a result of closing a Lake Michigan beach due to pollution. In 2006, sewage discharges contributed to the more than 3,200 beach closures or advisories throughout the Great Lakes region, a ten percent increase over 2005. 81 percent of Illinois' beaches had at least one

closure or contamination advisory, and my own district suffered 118 such actions. This is unacceptable.

Industrial plants along the Lakes are also contributing to the waters' degradation. This past summer we saw two major companies seek to increase pollution into the Lakes by a drastic margin and attempt to bypass or re-write other contamination limitations. Sadly, many of these actions were wholly within the laws designed to protect our waters. This too is unacceptable.

Our path forward is clear. In order to protect our largest source of drinking water and economic vitality, we must prevent any increase in municipal sewage and industrial discharge into the Lakes with the eventual goal of banning all such dumping. We must work with the Great Lakes industries, so crucial to the region, to develop and deploy technology which mitigates harmful discharges and protects the water. Most important, we must initiate a comprehensive restoration program on the scale of the Florida Everglades restoration. The Brookings Institution recently released a report which found that a full investment in all restoration principles outlined in the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration will yield direct economic benefits of at least $50 billion for this economically depressed region. Just achieving a 20

percent reduction in beach advisories and closures will result in an estimated benefit of $2-3 billion.

I therefore encourage this Committee to consider H.R. 2907, the Great Lakes Water Protection Act. This legislation, which Representative Dan Lipinski (D-IL) and I introduced, would set a date certain to end sewage dumping directly into the Great Lakes by increasing fines for dumping to $100,000 per violation, per day. The next 20 years would allow municipalities to upgrade their sewage system and ensure a level playing field for all communities along the Great Lakes. The bill would also establish a Great Lakes Clean-up fund within the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, to which all sewage dumping penalties will be directed. Funds would be used to spur projects such as habitat protection and wetland restoration.

In order to address a comprehensive restoration effort, Congress must also consider and pass the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Implementation Act of 2007, H.R. 1350, introduced by Representatives Verne Ehlers (R-MI) and Rahm Emanuel (D-IL). This landmark legislation would authorize key policy recommendations of the Regional Collaboration in the areas of invasive species, coastal health, wetlands and habitat protection,

toxic substances, research and monitoring and coordination and oversight of Great Lakes programs. H.R. 1350 will provide federal, state and local officials with an authoritative blueprint on how to collectively restore and protect the Great Lakes.

With the growing populations living along the American and Canadian shores of the Great Lakes, it is time we begin to fully invest in this national treasure to ensure its preservation for generations to come.

Thank you.