

## (March 5, 2007) Statement to the Press by Representative Dan Lipinski (IL-3) on Great Lakes

Statement to the Press by Representative Dan Lipinski (IL-3) on Great Lakes Restoration

CHICAGO, IL - Today Representative Dan Lipinski of Illinois issued the following statement at the Great Lakes Ad Hoc Congressional Hearing at Shedd Aquarium:

Good morning. I'm happy to be here today to address this crucial issue of restoring the most precious resource for our area and perhaps for our country, the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes play a key role in our history, and their restoration is vital to our future. For me personally, the Great Lakes have always held significant meaning. Growing up, I remember summers spent near - and in - Lake Michigan. Chicago has made great use of the lakefront. The Plan of Chicago, more popularly known as the Burnham Plan, set out much of the Chicago lakefront as a place of natural beauty and recreation. Today, almost a century later, Lake Michigan defines the Chicago region. When I went to Northwestern for college, being near the lake was a great attraction for me. And one of the first dates I had with my wife was watching the sunset on the beach in St. Joseph, Michigan, the other side of Lake Michigan. I have a picture of this on the desk of my Chicago office.

The beauty of Lake Michigan and the memories it has given mean a lot to me, but the Great Lakes are so much more. Holding 90 percent of our nation's fresh water supply and nearly 20 percent of the world supply, we are dependent upon the Great Lakes for everything from fresh drinking water, to transportation, tourism, recreation, and the \$4.1 billion sport and commercial fishing industry.

The Great Lakes are an irreplaceable treasure, but they are currently under attack from many directions. Pollution threatens the Great Lakes - in 2002, one-quarter of Great Lakes beaches were closed for at least one day because of public health and safety dangers. Habitat loss and degradation threaten the Great Lakes. Two-thirds of the fish in the lakes spawn in wetlands and near-shore habitat, but three-quarters of the region's shorelines have been degraded. Invasive species threaten the Great Lakes. 140 new species have been introduced into the Great Lakes ecosystem since the late 1800s, but none more deadly for the lakes than the Asian carp. Much work needs to be done to combat these threats.

Last Congress, I joined many of my colleagues in introducing the bipartisan Great Lakes Collaboration Implementation Act which would help communities improve their water infrastructure systems, restore fish and wildlife habitat in the Great Lakes region, and address pollution issues by cleaning up contaminated soil and reducing mercury pollution.

I am also actively supporting Rep. Kirk's invasive species bill that would require all ships with ballast tanks to flush those tanks, preventing invasive species from entering the lakes in this manner. This small legislative fix could have an enormous impact on the health of the Great Lakes.

I enthusiastically support Rep. Biggert's bill to fortify the Asian Carp Barrier on the Chicago Ship and Sanitary Canal. To my dismay, the Asian Carp are continuing to make slow but steady progress toward Lake Michigan and we must act now if we are going to prevent this disaster from unfolding. This year when the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee works on reauthorizing the Water Resources Development Act I will be strongly committed to addressing this key issue.

Since being appointed to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee I have worked hard to pass three significant clean water infrastructure bills that will directly benefit our Great Lakes. Each of these bills will be considered by the full House this week. The Water Quality Financing Act of 2007 (H.R. 720) authorizes appropriations of \$14 billion over the next five years for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund which finances important projects for wastewater treatment, pollution control, and watershed management. The Water Quality Investment Act of 2007 (H.R. 569) authorizes funding for combined sewer overflows and sanitary sewer overflows. So much of our nation's wastewater infrastructure is rapidly approaching or has already exceeded its projected useful life and this bill will assist communities in updating their sewer systems. Finally, H.R. 700, which authorizes funding for the Alternative Water Sources Act of 2000, provides money for water supply projects in areas where there is a critical need. Increased funding for water

infrastructure is essential to the economic and environmental health of the Great Lakes, the Chicago region, and the nation.

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District - represented this morning by President Terry O'Brien - along with the City of Chicago deserve recognition for all of the work they have done to address the problem of sewage release. The Tunnel and Reservoir Plan - abbreviated TARP - but more commonly known as the Deep Tunnel project, has been in progress for more than three decades. This project has reinvigorated the waters in the Chicago area by preventing the dumping of untreated sewage during heavy rainstorms, not to mention keeping the water out of so many basements. Deep Tunnel has been costly - 3 billion dollars, but the results for the ecosystem have been dramatic. I have continued to work together with other members of the Illinois delegation to secure funding for this project and it is now nearing completion; in May of last year I was in the Village of Hodgkins at the grand opening of the final part of the tunnel portion. The Deep Tunnel project serves as a great example of what can be done to decrease pollution in our lakes if we make the needed public investments.

I want to thank the Shedd Aquarium for hosting today; I can't think of a better place to hold this event. The aquarium not only sits on this beautiful site on the shores of Lake Michigan, but also plays a great educational role. The aquarium's 2007 Great Lakes Public Awareness Campaign will be using public relations, advertising, exhibits, and education outreach to continue to make people aware of the critical importance of the Lakes. As a former teacher, I know that education is crucial to bringing change. I grew up in the 1970s when the environmental movement was strong. I remember Captain Ecology and many other pop culture icons that taught us the need to care for our environment. This had a big impact on me because it educated me and raised my awareness. Everyone has an interest in restoring the Great Lakes, whether you want to swim, fish, boat, lie on the beach, or - most importantly - just have clean water to drink. People need to understand their interests, why restoration of the Great Lakes serves these interests, and what they can do.

Today I look forward to hearing from our panelists about what more we can do in Washington to help protect and restore the Great Lakes.