

(July 6, 2007) Lawmakers: Stop Great Lakes Sewage Dumping -- or Pay the Price

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Congressional heavy-hitters are pressing for a bipartisan prohibition on Great Lakes sewage dumping, introducing legislation supported by the Alliance for the Great Lakes.

The "Great Lakes Water Protection Act," introduced by U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk (R-III.) and Dan Lipinski (D-III.), calls for an end to industrial and domestic sewage dumping in the Great Lakes, and for quadrupling current fines for such discharges.

Appearing at a press conference in Chicago Thursday, Alliance president Cameron Davis praised Kirk's and Lipinski's leadership.

"This legislation does two things at once," Davis said. "It quadruples fines for sewage dumping -- creating a discharge surcharge so that it's no longer cheaper to pollute than to safeguard the Great Lakes."

The bill would also place discharge fines in a special Great Lakes cleanup fund to reinvest in Great Lakes health.

Rep. Kirk pointed to Detroit, Cleveland and Milwaukee as the three largest sewage dischargers in the Great Lakes. The Alliance, with partner organization Friends of Milwaukee's Rivers, has filed a federal lawsuit against the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District for overflows from 1993 through 2006.

Curbing such discharges was identified as a key need in a major Great Lakes restoration plan released in December. The "Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy" has met with the approval of Congressional champions, civic leaders, mayors, governors and tribal leaders, yet was not funded by the White House's proposed FY 07 budget.

If funded, the plan would help bring the Great Lakes back to life through markers such as reduced sewage overflows, cleaner beaches and drinking water, revitalized habitat, and fish that are safer to eat.

Congressional leaders have also introduced bills to implement these activities, though the legislation does not identify sources of funding. The bills are supported by dozens of organizations as part of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes® coalition.