

June 19, 2009

## Water Conservation Initiative Rethinks Water Use in the Great Lakes

### ***Great Lakes United announces 3-year program at the Toronto Waterfront Nautical Festival***

TORONTO, ON) – Standing at the base of one of Canada's largest tall ships, Great Lakes United executive director Derek Stack announced that the coalition will be pursuing a water conservation initiative that instills a new water consciousness in the Great Lakes region.

"The Great Lakes are at a crossroads. We've closed the door to large-scale diversions, but the greatest threat still remains: our own reckless and wasteful use of these fragile waters," said Stack.

The announcement comes amid a flurry of action in protection of the Great Lakes. Just last weekend U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lawrence Cannon heeded the call of groups like Great Lakes United and announced their intention to renegotiate the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, an historic pact of binational responsibility and action on pollution prevention and clean up. Meanwhile, U.S. President Obama has committed \$475 million dollars for Great Lakes clean up, municipalities across the region have identified their priorities for protecting the Great Lakes, and the province of Ontario has released its vision for a sustainable watershed.

"The stars are aligning for the Great Lakes," said John Jackson, Director of Clean Production and Toxics for Great Lakes United. "At the same time we can lighten the stresses that lead to water quality problems in the first place if we focus efforts on using less water, and using the water we do withdraw more wisely."

Great Lakes United's announcement on Toronto's waterfront coincides with the unveiling of Toronto's Waterfront Nautical Festival, and a unique partnership forged between Great Lakes United and the American Sail Training Association. Next summer, over 25 tall ships will race between seven Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River ports, bringing millions of people to the waterfront in the region's major cities. The Great Lakes United TALL SHIPS CHALLENGE® will be a chance to educate the public about the Great Lakes through fun and interactive programs amid a festival atmosphere.

"This partnership with the American Sail Training Association and port festivals like the Toronto Waterfront Nautical Festival gives us an opportunity to talk about the importance of Great Lakes protection by engaging with people on the waterfront," said Stack. "To truly understand how powerful, but also vulnerable, the Great Lakes are, you must see them and you must experience them."

The Great Lakes United TALL SHIPS CHALLENGE® is the public awareness aspect of a four pillar approach to water conservation in the region. The program builds on the momentum of the provinces and states to protect and

conserve the waters of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. Under the same agreement that stopped large scale diversions of water to outside of the basin, states and provinces also agreed to adopt conservation programs to stem our own wasteful water use. A three-year program, Great Lakes United's four pillars include:

1. Development of a model water conservation plan that each state and province can adopt;
2. Working in each state and province to ensure that the plan is adopted and implemented;
3. Working with two model communities facing their own water supply problems to demonstrate that water conservation can allow for community prosperity without an increase in water use; and,
4. A public awareness campaign launched during the Great Lakes United TALL SHIPS CHALLENGE® that engages individuals in Great Lakes protection and water conservation.

The Great Lakes contain an astounding 6 quadrillion gallons of water; only the polar ice caps and Lake Baikal in Siberia contain more fresh surface water. But any suggestion that this is an endless supply is false. In fact, less than 1 percent of Great Lakes water is renewed every year. It is this sliver of renewable, sustainable water that must meet the needs of 40 million people and the environment. But, those who live in the Great Lakes are the most wasteful water users in the world. Per capita, only the United States as a whole uses more water every year.

"This is a real opportunity for the provinces and states to become world leaders in water conservation," said Jackson. "Conservation is about more than just using less water. When we reduce our demands on this ecosystem, we relieve the stress on overburdened wastewater infrastructure, use less energy, and produce fewer greenhouse gases. Water conservation is the foundation to any long-term effort to protect the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River."

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