

# **Building Strong Collaborative Relationships for a Sustainable Water Resources Future:**

**GREAT LAKES COMMISSION**

SUMMARY OF REGIONAL WATER PLANNING

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The findings contained in this report are based on the information collected from the literature search and interviews for this initiative and should not be construed as an official Department of the Army position, policy or decision unless so designated by other official documentation.

# GREAT LAKES COMMISSION

## 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE GREAT LAKES COMMISSION

The Great Lakes Commission is an interstate compact agency that promotes the orderly, integrated and comprehensive development, use and conservation of the water and related natural resources of the Great Lakes basin and St. Lawrence River (shown in Figure 1). Its members include the eight Great Lakes states – Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin – with associate member status for the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Québec. Each jurisdiction appoints a delegation of three to five members comprised of senior agency officials, legislators and/or appointees of the governor or premier.

The Commission does not conduct planning for the region, but it serves four important functions that help the states develop plans: it develops and distributes information, it establishes priorities where there is consensus, it helps build consensus where there may be opposing views, and it advocates for legislation and funding when there is consensus. The Commission's primary purpose is to identify areas of unity – in indentifying both areas of concern and desired outcomes – and help the states act upon that unity with the support of stakeholders and government. The Commission was established by joint legislative action of the Great Lakes states in 1955, through signing of the Great Lakes Basin Compact, and granted congressional consent in 1968. A Declaration of Partnership established associate membership for the Canadian provinces in 1999. The purpose of the Commission is to carry out the terms and requirements of the Compact, as noted in Article 1: *To promote the orderly, integrated, and comprehensive development, use, and conservation of the water resources of the Great Lakes Basin.*

The Commission is one of several formal water resource planning entities in the Great Lakes Region. This summary focuses just on the Commission structure and planning efforts; however this is not to deemphasize the significance of other formal regional coalitions and compacts. In fact, the regional management of the Great Lakes water resources is currently centered on the



**Figure 1. Great Lakes and Drainage Basin**  
(Source [1])

2008 Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact. The 2008 Compact established the Great Lakes Water Resources Council, comprised of the governors from each of the eight Great Lakes states, and laid out the principles for which the waters of the Great Lakes Basin will be managed. The terms of the 2008 Compact have been signed into law in each of the member states.

## **2. STATE/REGIONAL WATER PLANNING STATUS**

In May, 2007 the Commission published its Strategic Plan through the year 2012, which includes a detailed list of goals, objectives and actions to be completed within that timeframe. The Commission approaches their role as a regional coordinator using an organized process (outlined in their 2007 Strategic Plan as Goals #1 through #4) consisting of facilitating communication, providing education, standardizing data collection, consolidating information, building consensus on regional policy positions, and advocating for those positions on the regional, national and international stage.

The Strategic Plan addresses how the Commission accomplishes its work through the four goal statements, while the Great Lakes Commission Work Plan 2008 to 2010 “addresses the kind of work the Commission pursues, focusing on five broad program areas: (1) Aquatic Ecosystems and Biodiversity; (2) Economy and Society; (3) Water Supply; (4) Coastal and Terrestrial Habitat; and (5) Water Quality” (Source [8]).

Water planning activities are dispersed amongst these programs, and will be discussed in this summary. The Commission also manages the Great Lakes Information Network (GLIN), which is an online resource for information related to the region. The site includes information on the environment, economy, education, and tourism, and houses GIS data.

The Great Lakes Commission has also been involved with developing the 2004 Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy, an effort involving numerous regional stakeholders that outlines a distinct set of action items that act as a comprehensive restoration blueprint for the Great Lakes. The key focus areas of this regional strategy are invasive species, habitat conservation, point and nonpoint source pollution, toxic substances, monitoring and coordination, and long-term sustainable growth and economic development (Source [6]).

## **3. RESPONSIBLE STATE AGENCIES/REGIONAL ENTITIES**

The Great Lakes Commission was established by a 1955 interstate compact to represent the eight Great Lakes states on a variety of environmental and economic issues. The compact was granted congressional consent by the federal government in 1968. The compact establishes the purpose of the Commission as the following (Source [2]):

1. *Promote orderly, integrated, and comprehensive development, use, and conservation of water resources.*
2. *Plan for the welfare and development of the water resources of the Basin as a whole as well as for those portions of the Basin which may have problems of special concern.*

3. *Make it possible for the states of the Basin and their people to derive the maximum benefit from utilization of public works.*
4. *Advise in securing and maintaining a proper balance among the various uses of the water resources of the Basin.*
5. *Establish and maintain an intergovernmental agency so as to more effectively accomplish the above purposes.*

The Commission operates under a board of directors, which consists of a chairman, vice chair, the chair of each state delegation, and a commissioner from each associated Canadian province. The Commission consists of three to five representatives from each of its member states; the process for selecting representatives to serve as commissioners varies by state. The current chairman of the board is Illinois Governor Patrick Quinn. The following individuals serve as points of contact:

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#### **4. WATER MANAGEMENT VISION AND GOALS**

In May, 2007 the Great Lakes Commission adopted an updated strategic plan, amounting to “a statement of vision, mission, goals, objectives and strategic actions to guide the work of the Great Lakes Commission through the year 2012” (Source [3]). The Commission’s vision for the region is listed below:

##### **Great Lakes Commission Vision for the Region – 2012 (Source [3])**

- *Our pride of place and sense of regional identity inspire our commitment to protect, maintain, restore and sustainably use our bounty of freshwater resources. Our children choose to live and work here because of the opportunities offered and high quality of life.*
- *The waters of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin (Basin) are accessible to the public and provide high quality drinking water for millions of people; safe, unpolluted beaches for swimming and boating; and a thriving fishery, free of consumption advisories.*
- *The waters of the Basin support a diverse and healthy web of plants, fish and wildlife. Governments and the public share a sense of stewardship and optimism that our waters, lands and related resources are being wisely used, managed, protected and enhanced.*
- *Harbors and waterways support recreational boating and a commercial navigation industry that efficiently moves goods, enhances the competitiveness of our regional economy, and sets*

- a global example in minimizing environmental impacts.*
- *Healthy and diverse populations of native flora and fauna are protected by preventing the introduction and spread of invasive species.*
  - *Government leaders recognize the importance of critical issues facing the Great Lakes, speak with a unified voice, and make decisions that enhance resource protection and economic development.*
  - *The Great Lakes region is viewed domestically and internationally as a model for sustainable development because of our commitment to stewardship of our resources.*

## **5. SCOPE OF WATER RESOURCES PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Strategic Plan for the Great Lakes Commission**

In 2007 the Commission released their most recent Strategic Plan, which is “a statement of vision, mission, goals, objectives and strategic actions to guide the work of the Great Lakes Commission through the year 2012” (Source [3]). This document contains specific goals, objectives and actions planned by the Commission – several of which are directly related to water planning for the region. They are divided into four themes: (1) Communication and Education; (2) Information Integration and Reporting; (3) Facilitation and Consensus Building; and (4) Policy Coordination and Advocacy. The Strategic Plan is the current framework outlining the work of the Commission; goals, objectives and action statements relevant to regional water planning are summarized below.

Goal 1: Communication and Education - *The Commission raises public awareness of ecosystem management and the links between environmental quality and economic viability. The Commission educates and empowers government, citizens and other stakeholders to effectively participate in decisions affecting the future of the region.*

A focal point of the Commission concerning communication and education is their information website, the Great Lakes Information Network (GLIN). They aim to use the site to make complex topics understandable to a lay audience, engage the public in solutions, and inform and advise state/provincial decision makers about Great Lakes issues. Also under this goal is the plan to help procure funding from federal or state sources for local entities for monitoring, cleanup and education programs. The Commission will also provide support for programs that work to prevent aquatic species invasion.

Goal 2: Information Integration and Reporting - *The Commission researches, collects, organizes and makes accessible data and information about the Great Lakes that is relevant to our Members, individually and collectively, and to others in the Great Lakes region. Decision makers rely on data maintained by the Commission to support planning, resource management and other activities.*

Recognizing the importance of sharing data and information amongst the numerous regional entities concerned with water resources, the Commission takes on the role of facilitator, instituting programs and processes to help connect the region. Their current goals in this arena include promoting uniform data collection and information management standards for the region,

facilitate information integration programs by supporting periodic forums (such as the Regional Data Exchange Conference), consolidate information (such as the regional GIS dataset), serve as a clearinghouse for data through the GLIN, and provide analysis and reporting on data trends. Of particular interest to water planning is the stated objective to “provide economic benefit-cost analyses to support policy and management decisions” (Source [3]). In 2006 the Commission prepared a set of guidelines and recommendations for the early detection of aquatic invasive species, under the premise that public and private institutions are poorly equipped to deflect the large economic, social and ecological costs incurred when introduced species become established as reproducing populations (Source [1]).

Goal 3: Facilitation and Consensus Building – *The Commission convenes and leads multi-stakeholder forums, projects and activities on issues and ideas of importance to Member jurisdictions and others. The Commission provides forums where emerging issues and ideas are identified, leading research is presented, conflicting views are shared and debated, and consensus is built around potential solutions.*

The Commission serves as an organizer for the region – both to bring together the various entities concerned with water resources and to consolidate regional positions on priority issues. This involves supporting existing committees and task forces focused on specific issues such as dredging, aquatic invasive species, and soil erosion. The Commission also plans to convene new task forces to address emerging concerns including renewable energy, water conservation, and coastal management. These objectives are accomplished by organizing meetings and developing and endorsing regional policy positions on emerging issues. The Commission also monitors and reviews other relevant policy forums – such as the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes – in order to be the voice of the Commission membership on the national/international and regional front. The Commission committees and task forces are:

- Great Lakes Air Deposition (GLAD) Program Management Team
- Great Lakes Dredging Team Great Lakes Information Network (GLIN) Advisory Board
- Great Lakes Observing System (GLOS) Regional Association (PDF)
- Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species
- Great Lakes Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Task Force
- Great Lakes Wind Collaborative
- Invasive Species in Trade Advisory Committee
- Lake Michigan Monitoring Coordination Council
- Michigan Statewide Public Advisory Council (SPAC)
- National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Great Lakes Committee
- Regional Inventory of Air Toxics Contaminants Steering Committee

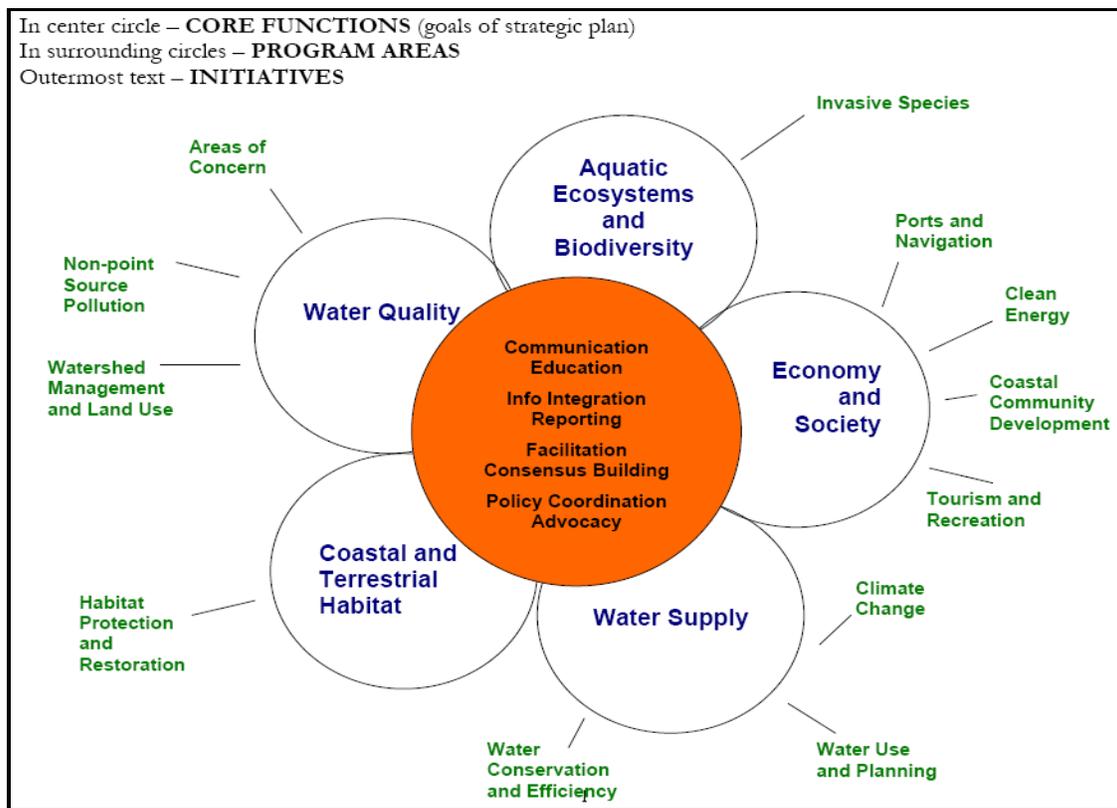
Goal 4: Policy Coordination and Advocacy – *The Commission helps the region speak with a common voice. The Commission provides coordination, support and advocacy on issues where there is consensus among its Members. The Commission assists and supports its Members in advocating common positions. The Commission conducts advocacy programs and activities in*

*coordination with other leading regional, national and international institutions. In formulating advocacy positions, the Commission welcomes opposing views.*

Building on a consolidated base of positions on the variety of issues facing the region, the Commission then seeks to influence policy makers in the region and in Washington in order to ensure supportive legislation and funding. The Commission coordinates this effort with other regional entities – particularly the Council of Great Lakes Governors<sup>1</sup>. The Commission organizes annual events in Washington to elevate the issues facing the Great Lakes region to national attention, and maintains a formal database to track appropriations and authorizations important to the region.

**Great Lakes Commission Work Plan 2008 to 2010**

In support of the Strategic Plan, in 2008 the Commission completed a Work Plan to document the kind of work undertaken by the Commission. The Work Plan presents the relationship between the four goals of the Strategic Plan and the Commissions program areas in the following diagram:



**Figure 2. Great Lakes Commission Strategic Plan Goals and Program Areas (Source [8])**

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the programs falling under the direct purview of the Commission, the Council of Great Lakes Governors, formed in 1983, has taken on the Great Lakes Water Management Initiative, which aims to protect and preserve the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River as invaluable water resources. The constituents that form the Council from the Great Lakes states and provinces have been cooperatively managing the waters of the region since signing the voluntary Great Lakes Charter of 1985. The Charter was updated in 2001 and the Council continues to put the goals of the Charter into action. The Council’s current project areas include water management, protection and restoration, international trade, and aquatic invasive species (5).

The Work Plan is structured as pictured in the above diagram – segmented into the five program areas, which each contain an explanation of the associated initiatives. Each initiative write-up contains a “problem statement outlining the issue and its importance to Member state/provinces and the Great Lakes; the goal, or what we are aiming to accomplish; objectives, or outcomes in pursuit of the goal; potential partnerships to accomplish this work; and evaluation techniques and metrics for measuring progress” (Source [8]).

The problem statement introduces the issue and gives a summary of past and present actions that have been initiated to address the issue. The goal is a succinct statement describing the desired outcome of the initiative; for example the invasive species initiative goal is: “An ecosystem where the health and diversity of native aquatic organisms is improving through prevention of the introduction and spread of non-indigenous invasive species” (Source [8]). There is a list of objectives associated with each initiative, which describe more specific actions that are to be taken to achieve the goal statement. A few examples from the invasive species initiative are: “advocate adoption of federal legislation to regulate ballast water discharges and comprehensive legislation to address all vectors; build consensus among regional agencies and stakeholders (emphasizing collaboration with industry and trade groups) by resolving controversies and impediments to progress; and increase capacity in the region to reduce the introduction and spread of AIS through sale and trade of live organisms and to execute rapid response plans” (Source [8]). Each write-up includes a list of relevant partnerships that the Commission works alongside in order to address the issue. This list typically includes generic groups (e.g. NGOs, federal governments, commercial and recreational groups, etc.) as well as specific organizations (e.g. Great Lakes states and provinces, Council of Great Lakes Governors, American Water Works Association, and Ducks Unlimited). Finally, within each initiative is a set of evaluation criteria and metrics for the Commission to use to assess its progress toward the goal. This includes a general statement to define a benchmark for which to measure overall progress against, for example “The ultimate measures of success are whether the rate of introductions of invasive species (currently one every eight months) has been reduced and whether mechanisms of introduction have been eliminated” (Source [8]). Following this general statement is a list of more specific, programmatic criteria to be used to track progress. Under the invasive species initiative, evaluation criteria are (Source [8]):

- *Congress enacted effective legislation regulating ballast water discharges. Great Lakes Members of Congress sponsored and pursued legislation to screen harmful species from trade routes.*
- *Industry and trade groups forged and adopted best management practices to reduce harmful organisms in trade and installed technology to treat ballast water.*
- *Funding for staff capacity and to support state management plans was increased.*
- *Partnerships with agencies and entities from outside of the region were forged.*
- *Federal agencies have adopted the advice of the Panel.*

## 6. PARTNERSHIPS, STAKEHOLDER, AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The overarching theme of the Great Lakes Commission is to work together with the various stakeholders to formulate an organized and consolidated approach to addressing regional issues. The Commission has processes in place to engage a diverse set of stakeholders in the task of protecting the water resources of the Great Lakes basin – from the educational resources of the GLIN to their work in Washington helping to develop federal legislation and appropriations. The following list includes a brief description of other Great Lakes agencies and organizations (Source [1]):

- Council of Great Lakes Governors  
*Devoted to working cooperatively on public policy issues common to the Great Lakes states.*
- Great Lakes Boating Federation  
*The Great Lakes Boating Federation was created to take advantage of the regional approach to lakefront development and waterway management, and to insure that recreational boaters are being heard when decisions affecting the future of the Great Lakes are being made.*
- Great Lakes Center for Ocean Sciences Education Excellence (COSEE)  
*COSEE Great Lakes is adding critical freshwater components to the national COSEE network and enhancing ocean/Great Lakes science literacy in the region and beyond.*
- Great Lakes Fishery Commission  
*The GLFC coordinates programs of research on the Great Lakes and recommends measures which will permit the maximum sustained productivity of Great Lakes fish.*
- Great Lakes Protection Fund  
*The Fund seeks projects that lead to tangible improvements in the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem and promote the interdependence of healthy ecological and economic systems.*
- Great Lakes Radio Consortium  
*The Great Lakes Radio Consortium produces environmentally focused radio features and news featured on more than 100 public radio stations around the Great Lakes region and several national radio programs.*
- Great Lakes Regional Collaboration  
*Guided by a U.S. Executive Order, the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) is a wide-ranging, cooperative effort to design and implement a strategy for the restoration, protection and sustainable use of the Great Lakes. A planning strategy document was released in December 2005.*
- Great Lakes Science Center (USGS)  
*The U.S. Geological Survey's Great Lakes Science Center was founded in 1927 and*

*continues to provide scientific information for the sound management of Great Lakes fish populations and other important natural resources in the basin.*

- **Great Lakes Sea Grant Network**  
*A network of Sea Grant colleges and programs working in partnership with government and the private sector to meet the changing needs of Americans living in the Great Lakes region.*
- **International Association for Great Lakes Research**  
*IAGLR is a scientific organization made up of researchers studying the Laurentian Great Lakes and other large lakes of the world, as well as those with an interest in such research.*
- **Michigan Small Harbors Coalition**  
*The Coalition, which began organizing in late 2007, aims to represent the interests of smaller ports and harbors in Michigan with critical dredging needs. To date, the group has received 25 signed resolutions of support from harbor communities and advocate organizations, and at least another 19 commercial and shallow draft ports have indicated a likelihood of support. The initiative is being facilitated by Michigan Sea Grant, the Great Lakes Commission and the Michigan Boating Industry Association.*
- **The Great Lakes Maritime Research Institute**  
*Established in December 2004, the GLMRI represents a consortium of the University of Minnesota-Duluth and the University of Wisconsin-Superior. This first-ever institute dedicated to the study of Great Lakes maritime commerce is pursuing research in marine transportation, logistics, economics, engineering, environmental planning and port management.*

In the 2007 Annual Report for the Great Lakes Commission, the following stakeholders were listed as sources of funding for the Commission (Source [7]):

- The Eight Commission Member States
- The Environment Report
- Government of Québec
- Great Lakes Fishery Commission
- Great Lakes Protection Fund
- Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant
- Industrial Economics, Inc.
- International Joint Commission
- Joyce Foundation
- Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
- Michigan Sea Grant
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), various programs
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service, Eastern Region
- USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Department of Energy, National Renewable Energy Laboratory
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA), Great Lakes National Program Office
- U.S. EPA, various programs

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Geological Survey, Federal Geographic Data Committee: National
- Spatial Data Infrastructure Cooperative Agreements Program
- Wege Foundation

A significant public education project exists within the Commission's Communication and Internet Technology program – The Education and Curriculum Homesite (TEACH). It is an online resource for teachers of elementary through high-school students, providing mini-lessons on Great Lakes topics. "TEACH is envisioned to be a 'virtual library' of curriculum and related educational materials, as well as an educators information exchange corner that will include a variety of list-serves and bulletin boards, image and map galleries, a speakers bureau, and basic introductions to scientific tools including Geographic Information Systems (GIS), lake and watershed monitoring activities, hands-on science opportunities, and much more" (Source [4]).

## **7. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**

The Great Lakes Commission's Work Plan for 2008 to 2010 includes lists of metrics for each initiative that fall within their five program areas. The five program areas are designed to support the four goals set forth in the Commission's Strategic Plan. The program areas have individual staff including managers and program specialists to implement the respective projects. There is a periodic project update document released by the Commission that details the progress of ongoing projects.

## **8. OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

Currently, the Great Lakes Commission does not have a published assessment of the status of the various goals and objectives presented in the Work Plan. The Work Plan is intended to guide the Commission's activities through 2010.

## **9. NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND CRITICAL PRIORITIES - INTERVIEW INSIGHTS**

The Great Lakes region is now in a position where it has been awarded a substantial amount of federal funding for restoration, therefore the critical challenge facing entities such as the Great Lakes Commission is how to spend the money wisely. In the Strategic Plan and supporting Work Plan, the Commission has defined the issues that warrant the most attention. The Commission also recognizes that an important aspect of Great Lakes restoration must be economic growth. The strategy set forth by the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration places emphasis on the economic benefit of environmental restoration in the region, and the Commission sees its current situation as an opportunity to harness Great Lakes restoration as a stimulator for the recessed regional economy. A specific example of this goal is the issue of commerce versus invasive species. The Commission aims to strike a balance between the economic benefits the Lakes provide for commercial transportation and the debilitating invasive species problems that result from unregulated vessels moving through the system. The Commission needs to bring stakeholders together in collaboration in order to build consensus on issues facing the region. Education and data management are key aspects of getting everyone on the same page and in a position to negotiate a solution. The Commission has learned the importance of building consensus through guiding principles and agreements because of their position as a multi-national organization.

The issue of climate change is addressed directly in the Commissions Work Plan Water Supply Initiative (see Figure 2). Specific concerns for the region include not only the increased frequency and intensity of storm events, but also the issue of decreasing lake water levels. This has been observed over the past several years and can have devastating effects on coastal infrastructure, navigation, commerce, and recreation.

The Great Lakes Commission is unique in that it does not need to seek funding from the federal government at this point in time. The current administration has appropriated ample money to restore the Great Lakes region. The Commission would like to see more federal regulation on issues facing the region, such as a ballast treatment standard to curb the influx of invasive species via commercial vessels.

## 10. REFERENCES

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