



THE WEEKLY CLOSER

U.S. SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE
MAJORITY PRESS OFFICE

FRIDAY, MARCH 17, 2006

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 7

THE WEEK IN REVIEW...

- [Opening Statement By Senator James M. Inhofe: Hearing On The Great Lakes Restoration Plan](#)
- [Inhofe Applauds President's Choice of Dirk Kempthorne to Be Interior Secretary](#)

EPW RESOURCES

- [Majority Press Releases](#)
- [Speeches](#)
- [Fact of the Day Archive](#)
- [Weekly Closer Archive](#)
- [Schedule](#)
- [Past Hearings](#)
- [Multimedia](#)

QUOTE OF THE WEEK...

"The environment is cocktail party fare in places like New York, Boston and Washington, D.C. But in places like Libby, Montana, Klamath Falls, Oregon and Nye County, Nevada, where people's livelihoods depend on living off the land, the environment is a life or death matter. In these places, and hundreds of other communities just like them, Bush's promise to balance the needs of nature with the needs of people was well received in places that had suffered years of economic hardship in the name of snail darters, short nosed suckers and spotted owls. People from New Mexico to the Canadian border were tired of being told by bureaucrats and environmental activists that under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act they would no longer be allowed to graze their livestock, water their crops, turn a shovel or saw a tree because some obscure plant, insect, fish bird or animal might somehow be impacted. It didn't matter whether it meant they could not feed their families, schools would have to close or whether recovery plans were based on weird science."

"Endangered Species Act: Time to reform old law"
Editorial
Labontan Valley News and Fallon Eagle Standard (Nev.)
March 14, 2006

OPENING STATEMENT BY SENATOR JAMES M. INHOFE: HEARING ON THE GREAT LAKES RESTORATION PLAN

Thursday, March 16, 2006

Today we have a very distinguished group of witnesses to discuss a topic of great importance to many members of this Committee, how to restore the Great lakes. My colleague Senator Voinovich requested this full committee hearing to examine the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy and I will be turning the Chair over to him after I conclude my opening remarks.

The Great Lakes Strategy outlines goals and milestones that must be achieved in order to fully restore the Great Lakes. It is a collaboration of federal, state and local stakeholders who have all come together behind these goals. They are to be commended for this effort. While I appreciate the work that went into the crafting of the Strategy and understand the importance of the Great Lakes to the region and the nation, I have some concerns about the administration of programs in the region as well as the budget impacts of the Strategy's funding recommendations.

In 2003, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report that identified several concerns with the restoration effort in the Great Lakes. The GAO found that there are 148 federal and 51 state programs funding environmental restoration in the Great Lakes basin with 33 Great Lakes-specific programs. While the EPA administers most of the federal dollars, the GAO found that there was not one organization in charge of coordinating the overall effort. According to GAO, the EPA's Great Lakes Program Office had been charged with coordinating the restoration effort in the 1987 amendments to the Clean Water Act but had not done so. The GAO also cited the need for one decision-making body to prioritize funding and restoration projects.

In 2004 the President signed an Executive Order establishing the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force. The Task Force was charged with coordinating the federal agencies with a presence in the Basin. The Executive Order also established a Working Group that will determine how to implement the recommendations of the Task Force. The EPA's Great Lakes program office will report to both the Task Force and the Working Group. However, as noted in a September 2004 GAO report, "both the Great Lakes National Program Office and the newly created interagency task force have coordination roles raising uncertainty as to how leadership and coordination efforts will be exercised in the future."

Further, as noted by the Strategy and GAO, there is not enough data or monitoring on the Great Lakes. According to the Strategy report "Unfortunately, ecosystem monitoring, observation, research, indicator development and modeling efforts in the Great Lakes region are currently under-funded, lack comprehensive ecosystem approaches and exist only as piecemeal programs."

I commend the coalition that drafted the Strategy for acknowledging the data problems and for recommending several approaches for addressing them. However, the strategy does not outline a priority system for when the various recommendations, including those to address the lack of data, should be implemented. This is a critical piece that is missing.

The Strategy calls for an infusion of nearly \$20 billion for the next 5 years. In most cases the Strategy does not identify the source of the funds but much of it appears to be designated as federal dollars. In its report to the President, the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force noted that in fiscal year 2004, the federal government alone spent over \$523.9 million on Great Lakes Basin restoration projects and over the course of the next ten years, anticipates spending \$5 billion. We need to take a very close look at the 200 programs currently operating in the area and the \$523.9 million we are currently providing to the region. Is there overlap and redundancy? Can some of the funds be used to meet a higher priority goal within the Strategy? These are questions that must be answered before we can consider adding to the federal contribution.

Included in the \$20 billion request is \$7.5 billion in federal grants to assist the Great Lakes states with meeting their water infrastructure needs. This is in addition to the Strategy's call for full funding the Clean Water SRF at \$1.35 billion and the Drinking Water SRF at \$1 billion. I agree that the SRF needs to

be fully funded because it meets a nationwide need. However, we must heed the advice of the Interagency Task Force when it stated that restoration goals should “focus on what can be accomplished within current projections.” While I disagree with the Administration’s proposed cut to the clean water SRF, I must question how we can provide \$1.5 billion per year to the Great Lakes basin in grants when we cannot even fund the national clean water loan program at \$1 billion per year.

The lack of data and the lack of funding are nationwide problems and are not limited to just the Great Lakes Basin. Therefore any effort to address them must be part of a nationwide approach that will assist all communities, not just those in the Basin. We simply cannot provide funds to these states while ignoring the needs of other states, including my state of Oklahoma which itself has pressing water quality needs but lacks a national program office at the EPA.

I understand the significance of the Great Lakes to our nation and in particular to the people who live within the Basin. There is a limited federal role in the restoration of this and other watersheds. Particularly in these times of limited federal resources, we must look at requests for these regional priorities in the context of their current funding and the funding available for similar problems throughout the nation. We must also ensure the money is being spent wisely and efficiently. While much progress has been made in just the past few years in terms of the oversight of the Great Lakes programs, much more is needed before we can add to the federal contribution of over one half a billion dollars per year.

My colleague, Senator Voinovich, will chair the remainder of the hearing.

[Return to the top](#) 

INHOFE APPLAUDS PRESIDENT’S CHOICE OF DIRK KEMPTHORNE TO BE INTERIOR SECRETARY

Chairman Inhofe yesterday applauded President Bush’s choice of current Idaho Governor and former U.S. Senator Dirk Kempthorne to succeed Gale Norton as Secretary of the Interior.

“I’ve known Dirk Kempthorne for many years and he will keep a steady hand at the helm of the Department of the Interior,” Senator Inhofe said. “The EPW Committee oversees many of the programs under the Department. As a current governor, and former senator and member of our committee, Governor Kempthorne’s knowledge and experience will serve him and the nation well. I look forward to working with him again and welcome him back to the nation’s capital.”

[Return to the top](#) 

Bill Holbrook, Communications Director
Matt Dempsey, Deputy Press Secretary