

Preamble of Bill 100

Ontarians are fortunate to live in a province, which benefits from the largest freshwater ecosystem on earth. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin is a critical resource for all Ontarians.

The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin provides for the health and well-being of Ontarians. It provides drinking water and supports a variety of fish and other wildlife. First Nations communities within the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin maintain a spiritual and cultural relationship with water. Ontario's economy relies upon the water for electricity generation, agriculture, manufacturing and shipping. Ontarians and visitors enjoy the Great Lakes; Ontario's defining natural features, for the recreational opportunities they provide and natural attractions, such as Niagara Falls.

In the face of the pressures of population growth and development, and threats such as climate change and invasive species, three of Ontario's four Great Lakes are in decline. While many partners are working together to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin to ensure that it provides Ontarians with a source of water that is drinkable, swimmable and fishable, more needs to be done.

All Ontarians have a stake in the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin. The Government of Ontario seeks to involve individuals and communities in its protection and restoration.

Introductory Statement by Hon. James J. Bradley, Minister of the Environment, on June 6, 2012:
Excerpt taken from [Hansard](#) on Wednesday, June 6, 2012.

Statements by the Ministry and Responses

Protection of Great Lakes

Hon. James J. Bradley: The speech from the throne in November 2011 stated our government's commitment to develop a Great Lakes Protection Act. Today, I have the honour of introducing proposed legislation that, if passed, would help restore and protect the Great Lakes so that they stay drinkable, swimmable and fishable.

From the earliest days of the First Nations, the story of our province has unfolded through our connection to, and dependence on, our Great Lakes and their many tributary rivers and streams. Holding one fifth of the world's surface freshwater resources, home to biologically rich ecosystems, they have supplied our drinking water, powered our towns and cities, irrigated our farms, filled our fishers' nets, cooled our factories and provided countless hours of recreation, relaxation and spiritual sustenance for Ontario families and visitors alike. Our Great Lakes are the great keystone of our economy and quality of life.

Ontario has long worked to protect the Great Lakes. Levels of many toxic chemicals have been reduced. Polluted hot spots have been cleaned up in Collingwood Harbour and Severn Sound on Georgian Bay, and Wheatley Harbour on Lake Erie. And we have seen the return of bald eagles and Atlantic salmon to Lake Ontario. These are heartening accomplishments, and members on all sides of the House can justly feel pride in them.

But population growth and emerging issues, including new chemicals of concern, invasive species, pollution and climate change, are stressing the Great Lakes. New challenges are overwhelming old solutions. That is why our government is introducing the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act today.

The proposed act, an enabling act, would, if passed, provide new tools for the Ontario government to protect beaches, wetlands and other coastal areas of the Great Lakes, and the waterways that flow into them. It would establish a Great Lakes guardians' council. The council would be chaired by the Minister of the Environment and would include other ministers with Great Lakes responsibilities as well as representatives of municipalities, First Nations and Métis communities, and other stakeholders. The council would identify provincial Great Lakes improvement priorities and focus resources on addressing these provincial priorities.

The proposed act would authorize the Minister of the Environment to set targets and to require public bodies to develop and implement initiatives to address particular Great Lakes problems. The proposed act would be accompanied by a Great Lakes community action fund. The fund would help volunteers to undertake improvement projects in their corner of the Great Lakes. A cottagers' association could conduct a spring cleanup project to remove trash from a stretch of shoreline or wetland. A service organization could organize a weekly beach patrol to keep beaches clear of flotsam and jetsam throughout the warmer-weather months. A fishing club could sponsor tree plantings along the shores of a tributary stream to shade and cool the water, improving sport fish habitat.

We are committed to working with all orders of government, with aboriginal communities and with our partners and municipalities, business leaders, scientists, community groups and environmental organizations to protect and restore the Great Lakes. I encourage all members of the House to stand with us and be true guardians of the Great Lakes. Thank you.