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## Meeting's focus is Great Lakes

**International conference to look for solutions to water diversion, contamination, climate change, invasive species**

**Monday, September 15, 2003**

**BY TRACY DAVIS**  
News Staff Reporter

On Friday and Saturday, hundreds of scientists and policy makers will descend on Ann Arbor for the International Joint Commission's biennial conference on the Great Lakes.

The conference convenes every couple of years in a different city in the Midwest or Canada to assess the world's largest freshwater lake system, discuss new threats posed by water diversion, contamination, climate change and other issues, share research, and this year, to jump-start a discussion about restoring the lakes' health.

"Restoring the Greatness," the theme for this year's conference, will be no easy task.

The lakes face many threats. Invasive species are choking out native life. Many states outside the Great Lakes region have their eyes on the world's largest source of fresh water. Shoreline development has increased runoff and pollution to delicate shallow water habitat. Mercury and other chemicals have hurt the fishing industry while beach closings threaten tourism.

And everyone has different plans for fixing the problems. Agencies, governments, nonprofit groups and businesses have a huge interest in policies governing the lakes, which hold 20 percent of the world's fresh water.

In Ann Arbor alone, there are at least seven Great Lakes agencies, including

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Meeting's focus is Great Lakes

the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes Information Network, the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission, the U.S. Geological Survey's Great Lakes Science Center, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory and Michigan Sea Grant.

How does everyone get on the same page in planning a comprehensive and fair restoration effort that balances the needs and desires of farmers, cities, businesses and environmental groups while ensuring the preservation of the lakes' beauty and health?

Dennis Schornack, chair of the U.S. Section of the International Joint Commission, looks to the Everglades restoration project in Florida as a potential model.

The key difference is that Florida is only one state. The Great Lakes are bordered by two nations with eight states and two provinces.

"The whole idea is that it's going to be difficult to clean up the Great Lakes unless we have a central restoration plan that we can follow," said the international commission's spokeswoman, Jennifer Day. "Everyone is trying to come up with a plan that can work, and right now we have different restoration bills going through Congress. We thought it would be very beneficial to bring all these groups together."

The conference, expected to draw more 400 to town, begins Friday with panels and workshops for paid registrants. Saturday is free of charge and open to the public for participation in question-and-answer sessions and a "town hall meeting."

Some of those scheduled to speak or host panels include researchers, scientists, administrators, lawmakers and policy specialists from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Great Lakes Commission, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Council of Great Lakes Industries and various universities and Canadian governments.

The conference has been held in years past in Milwaukee, Niagara Falls, Windsor, Montreal, and Duluth, Minn.

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