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U.S. Army
Corps of Engineers

Great Lakes Biohydrological Information

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has completed a draft report that provides an inventory of existing data relevant to the management of Great Lakes water, analysis of data gaps, and a series of alternatives for improving and managing the data to support environmentally sound decisions regarding withdrawals, diversions and consumptive uses of Great Lakes water. This report was developed under the authority of Section 455 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1999, entitled “John Glenn Great Lakes Basin Program.” The “Biohydrological Information” study was one of four regional studies and support programs included in this authority.

The Corps’ Biohydrological Information study was initiated in parallel with the signing of an Annex to the Great Lakes Charter by the Governors and Premieres of the Great Lakes States and Provinces in 2001. In response to this Annex, the States and Provinces developed a decision making framework for management of future withdrawals, diversions and consumptive uses of Great Lakes waters. The Annex 2001 effort was completed in December 2005 with the signing of the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Sustainable Water Resources Agreement, which created a Regional Body to oversee its administration and a new interstate compact to be submitted for approval by the legislatures of the eight Great Lakes States.

The Biohydrological Information study has inventoried data on Great Lakes surface water, groundwater and biological systems in collaboration with policy and technical experts across the region. The inventory has been analyzed to assess the adequacy of information resources to support federal, state, provincial agencies when making decisions related to prospective water withdrawals from the system.

A systematic assessment of the federal role in information collection, analysis, and distribution has been made and data gaps that could affect scientifically defensible decision making identified. The report outlines alternative plans for data collection and management by federal agencies to support the State/Provincial water management decisions, including the status quo and a range of enhanced data systems. The report includes information on resources and funding necessary to implement these alternative plans. As directed in the authorizing legislation, the report presents the status of issues and recommendations in two previous reference studies of the International Joint Commission related to consumptive use and lake levels.

The draft Biohydrological Information report is being provided to the Great Lakes States for review and comment. This draft is available on the Internet at www.lre.usace.army.mil/ under the John Glenn Great Lakes Basin Program. When finalized, the report will be provided to Congress, the International Joint Commission and the Great Lakes States.

In addition to this Biohydrological Information study, the John Glenn Great Lakes Basin Program includes an authority to provide technical assistance to the Great Lakes States to “develop interstate guidelines to improve the consistency and efficiency of State-level water use activities and policies in the Great Lakes basin.”

The Corps’ point of contact for this study and the John Glenn Great Lakes Basin Program is Adam Fox from the Detroit District at (313) 226-6710.