

10-16-2012

Preserving a National Treasure

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls

Recommended Citation

"Preserving a National Treasure" (2012). *News Releases*. 573.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/573

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marketing and Communications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in News Releases by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlange1@udayton.edu.

University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



Preserving a National Treasure

10.16.2012 | Service and Giving, Faculty, Energy and Environment, Culture and Society

(This op-ed originally appeared in the Cincinnati Enquirer Oct. 14, 2012. Bob Taft is former governor of Ohio and former chair of the Council of Great Lakes Governors. He is a distinguished research associate at the University of Dayton. All op-ed pieces are the opinion of faculty members; they do not represent official University of Dayton positions on issues.)

Cedar Point is an amusement park on the shores of Lake Erie in Ohio. It is the second oldest in the United States.

I remember being at Cedar Point with our young daughter on a warm mid-summer's day in a roller-coaster car climbing toward the summit and anticipating the plunge. I was in awe. But it was not from the impressive height of the roller coaster alone — but because of the incredible view that it afforded me. And from those heights, for the first time I was struck by the vastness and the uniqueness of the Great Lakes. It was one of those singular moments that stay with you for a lifetime. The smells, the sounds, the air, the glint of the sun off the water and nothing but blue all the way to the horizon where the world seemed to end.

As I started to travel Ohio during campaigns, Lake Erie became a central geographic feature in my life, often measuring my locations in distance from “the Lake.” We marveled at its abundant fisheries and vacationed on its islands. We were nourished by its waters and by its beauty. But as much as I appreciated the Great Lakes, I had no idea at the time that I would one day stand with seven other Great Lakes governors and two Canadian premiers to pledge the dedication of their state's and province's vigilance and resources to help protect and restore these national treasures.

When as chair of the Council of Great Lakes Governors, I joined with my fellow governors in creating the Great Lakes Compact to safeguard the waters of the Great Lakes, I felt the same “relief” that my great-grandfather President William Howard Taft must have felt when he created Glacier National Park decades before. It was the relief of knowing that our generation would not fail generations who bequeathed the Lakes pristine to us, nor generations hence who would expect the same of us.

The Great Lakes continue to be under siege from pollutants and invasive species like Asian carp that threaten the greatest single source of surface fresh water in the world and the fisheries they make possible. But there have been great success stories. For instance, in Ohio, clean-up of Toledo's Ottawa River, a major source of pollution in Lake Erie, was meant to be a two-year project. Instead, it was finished in six months and under budget. Storm water management in Cleveland's Big Creek Watershed has also greatly reduced pollution into Lake Erie. Restoration projects are producing results for Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes — but there's more work to do in Ohio and around the eight-state region.

If there's one thing we've all learned about this fight, it will be much easier with presidential leadership. In fact, I'll go one step further. The battle against pollutants and invasive species cannot be won without it. In the lingering economic struggle of the great recession, the Great Lakes states, no matter how dedicated, would be hard-pressed to find the resources for clean-up, restoration and protection. The federal government's commitment to the Great Lakes is essential.

In the end, doing nothing is the most costly choice. Projects to address sewage overflows, polluted runoff and habitat loss will only get more difficult and expensive the longer we wait. Further, allowing Asian carp to take hold in the lakes threatens to undermine the progress we're currently making. If we do not identify and contain pollution, we will have to find new sources of drinking water for 30 million people. Are we really willing to risk 20 percent of the world's surface fresh water?

The Great Lakes are an “every-American issue.” They are not a partisan issue any more than Glacier National Park was a partisan issue. The Great Lakes are not a regional issue any more than the BP oil spill was a regional issue.

The Congress understood the national importance of these waters when it approved the Great Lakes Compact four years ago. In this presidential campaign season, both candidates and both parties should take note. There is no issue on which the people of all eight Great Lakes states are as united as on clean-up and restoration: 70 percent of Republicans, 72 percent of Independents and 79 percent of Democrats want restoration funding to continue.

So, we'll offer candidates an easy way into the hearts of Great Lakes voters for President Obama and Governor Romney. Take the Great Lakes Protection and Restoration Candidate Pledge affirming the precious nature of this great asset and committing

to do whatever is necessary to protect and restore it, including an effective defense against the Asian carp.

It's a winning issue, for the Great Lakes states and for our nation.

Contact Teri Rizvi, associate vice president for University communications, at 937-229-3241.