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[Invasive species changes included in lakes agreement](#)

By Journal staff and The Associated Press

POSTED: June 15, 2009

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NIAGARA FALLS, Ontario - The United States and Canada will update a key agreement to protect the Great Lakes from invasive species, climate change and other established and emerging threats to the world's biggest surface freshwater system.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Saturday that the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, which was last amended in 1987, is no longer sufficient.

She announced the deal to revise it - something environmental groups have been pushing for - with Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon during a ceremony marking the 100th anniversary of the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909. The treaty created an international commission to settle water-related disputes between the two countries.

"It's crucial that we honor the terms of the Great Lakes agreement as it stands today," Clinton said on the international Rainbow Bridge with Niagara Falls as a backdrop. "But we also have to update it to reflect new knowledge, new technology and, unfortunately, new threats."

Locally, the leader of the Superior Watershed Partnership said he is pleased with the announcement.

"It's all very good, and we like the fact that Hillary Clinton is leading the effort," SWP Director Carl Lindquist said. "This way it gets the high profile it deserves."

The agreement commits the United States and Canada to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the Great Lakes Basin ecosystem. Since the agreement was first signed in 1972, levels of polychlorinated biphenyls, mercury, dioxin and other pollutants have dropped and the lakes have seen the return of the bald eagle and other species.

But Great Lakes states and provinces have worried in recent years that the cleanup has lost momentum amid new threats from the growing population, new chemicals and climate change.

"These changes will address what are now the weak spots in the agreement," Lindquist said. "One that is especially emerging is the chemical issue - we addressed that with the pharmaceutical collections several years ago."

That was when the partnership collected unused and old prescription drugs from area residents to be properly disposed of, instead of being flushed into sewers that eventually make their way into the Great Lakes.

Lindquist said he would like to see funding that would help keep areas like Lake Superior in its near-pristine condition.

"We hope that the agreement can emphasize protecting the headwaters of the lakes," he said. "That's equally as important as restoring the (pollution) hot spots that receive a disproportionate amount of the funding."

He likened it to health care, in which the importance of prevention has often taken a back seat to treating disease.

Lindquist said he would also like to see various environmental protections become more coordinated.

"We see dozens of Great Lakes, international and national agreements, but there's not been a very good way of simplifying and condensing all the rules and laws so that not only local and state governments, but nonprofit organizations and the average citizen can understand what they mean," he said.

Article Photos




In a photo provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a group of zebra mussels, taken from Lake Erie, are seen. Many of the 183 invasive species known to inhabit the lakes arrived in ballast water dumped by oceangoing ships. (AP photo)

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