

# Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan - 2002

## 1.0 Introduction to the Lake Huron Initiative - 2002

Lake Huron, unlike the other Great Lakes does not have a lakewide management planning process to drive future efforts. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Environment Canada, the parties responsible for development of lakewide management plans do not have resources to initiate such an effort for Lake Huron at this time. As a result, the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes, with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Environment Canada as partners, has undertaken this effort to initiate action on Lake Huron. Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan - 2002, is an update of the original Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan that was released by the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes in March 2000. This new Action Plan updates and expands on issues identified in the original document. The Action Plans was and is still intend to be a dynamic document that will change as environmental/natural resources issues are addressed. As such, this document, revising the Action Plan released in March 2000, will still be called the Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan.

The Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan is an effort to begin discussion of:

- issues of importance to Lake Huron,
- actions that need to be taken to protect and restore the Lake Huron ecosystem, and
- development of partnerships to begin undertaking efforts that can not be accomplished by individual agencies alone.

The *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* has been developed with extensive agency involvement. Most of this involvement has been through review and comment on draft reports prepared by the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes. Even with extensive agency involvement, this document represents only the initial efforts necessary to sustain continual improvement in the Lake Huron ecosystem. Future efforts of the Lake Huron Initiative must be to:

- build upon information and actions identified in this report,
- involve additional stakeholders, and
- develop additional components of an overall Lake Huron ecosystem management plan including human health perspectives and indicators of ecosystem health to enable measurement of progress for Lake Huron.

One of the intentions of the *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* is to identify specific actions that could be initiated to achieve future protection and restoration of the Lake Huron Basin. Although agencies involved in the *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* are generally supportive of the goals identified, the plan is not intended to commit agencies to complete specific actions identified. The plan is intended to identify needed actions and develop a sense of relative priority of such actions. In addition, agencies involved in the Lake Huron Initiative will use this strategic plan to communicate goals, set priorities and pursue resources for future actions.

Most agencies involved in the *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* develop annual or biennial work plans identifying specific resources and funding commitments to move toward protection and restoration of Lake Huron. These annual work plans will be more specific than this *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* and will reflect the agencies' priorities for action. Specific commitments included in the work plans will be selected based on availability of resources and ability of the agencies or other interested parties to secure commitments for action.

| General Lake Huron Facts          |                  |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Length.....                       | 206 miles        |
| Breadth.....                      | 183 miles        |
| Average depth.....                | 195 feet         |
| Maximum depth.....                | 750 feet         |
| Volume.....                       | .850 cubic miles |
| Water surface.....                | 23,000 sq. miles |
| Watershed area.....               | 51,700 sq. miles |
| Shoreline length (w/islands)..... | 3,827 miles      |
| Retention time.....               | 22.6 years       |
| Total population.....             | 2,694,154        |
| Michigan.....                     | 1,502,687        |
| Ontario.....                      | 1,191,467        |
| Islands.....                      | more than 30,000 |

Source: Environment Canada/U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1996

One of the purposes of the Lake Huron Initiative is to develop an action-oriented process for addressing Lake Huron and to help identify priority issues and future efforts needed to ensure a sustainable Lake Huron watershed. As a result of a number of conferences and workshops the *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* has identified immediate future efforts focusing on two key issues:

- Critical pollutants/use impairments
- Fish and wildlife populations, habitat and biodiversity

Focusing on two issues does not reduce or eliminate the need to address other Lake Huron issues. However, with a realization of limited resources, these key issues were identified for immediate action with other issues to be addressed as the Lake Huron Initiative participants pursue an iterative process of updating and supplementing on-going efforts. This will hopefully result in an action-oriented process focused on development and implementation of activities to restore and protect the Lake Huron Basin and assessment of the effectiveness of those actions. Moreover, it is the objective of this report to initiate a discussion of the following issues:

- Assessment of environmental conditions of the open waters, and nearshore areas and tributaries of Lake Huron,
- Identification of critical pollutants responsible for causing impaired uses,
- Identification of issues critical to the protection and restoration of fish and wildlife habitat and biodiversity, and
- Identification of efforts needed to restore and protect habitat, assuring biodiversity within the watershed, and identification of areas where more information is needed to make decisions leading to actions.

The *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* identifies recommended priority actions for the Lake Huron Initiative partners and other stewards in the basin. Serious issues have been identified for the Lake Huron Basin regarding use impairments, critical pollutants, habitat, and biodiversity that must be addressed in order to ensure the health and sustainability of the Lake Huron ecosystem into the future. This plan outlines priority programs and initiatives that the participating state, federal, and tribal agencies need to address to ensure a healthy and sustainable Lake Huron ecosystem.

The *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* also identifies potential indicators for Lake Huron. Many of the indicators proposed for use in Lake Huron already have significant data collection efforts underway. These indicators will be of specific use for determining long-term historical trends.

Many of the issues identified in the *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* can be accomplished through focusing efforts of existing programs. However, the basin's size and multiple bi-national political jurisdictions, require coordination among those programs as well as special basinwide and local initiatives. While governmental agencies are in a position to provide leadership for implementing the plan, success will depend on leveraging both governmental and non-governmental organization involvement and resources. Success will also require engaging local governments whose authority and local decision-making collectively has a significant impact on the natural resources and sustainability of communities throughout the Lake Huron Basin. All of this will require coordination and strong communication among government agencies and other stakeholders.

Because restoration and protection of Lake Huron ecosystem is a long-term process development of the *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* is intended to be an iterative process requiring periodic refinement building upon lessons learned, successes, new information and public input. This continuing process of iterative refinement will allow for identification of information and research gaps and actions to close those gaps.

The focus of the *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* is to identify efforts that need to be undertaken for the restoration and protection of the Lake Huron ecosystem. To this end, the document has been formatted to include action items at the end of Sections 4.0 and 5.0. These actions are important in moving toward a voluntary, collaborative process of ecosystem restoration. It should be understood that actions identified do not represent all activities that need to be undertaken. Rather, they represent a basis for discussion and initial actions.

A great deal of knowledge has been gained through the lakewide management planning efforts for lakes Michigan, Superior, Erie and Ontario. Those efforts have been used as a basis for the *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan*. This report is not a lakewide management plan. It is, however, a document that can be looked upon to eventually identify goals, objectives and implementation activities necessary to continue efforts of restoring and protecting Lake Huron.

A significant portion of the information found within the *Lake Huron Initiative Action Plan* is derived from previous State of the Great Lakes Ecosystem Conference (SOLEC) reports. Information not found in SOLEC reports has been cited. Acronyms used in this report are cited in Glossary of Terms/Acronyms at the end of the document.

## 2.0 Public Involvement

During the State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference '96 (SOLEC '96, a biennial conference sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Environment Canada and directed towards Great Lakes activities) conference participants in an effort to identify future efforts recommended actions to address nearshore problems within the Great Lakes Basin. Two key recommended actions specific to Lake Huron were:

- The public requires a summary of information on the Lake Huron ecosystem to prioritize actions and effect change,
- Initiate a "Lake Huron Alliance" of researchers, implementors, community groups, and other interested parties in the absence of a Lake Huron Lakewide Management Plan.

In response, the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes convened the Lake Huron Conference (June 1998), the Lake Huron Workshop (January 1999) the Lake Huron Stakeholders Workshop (January 2000) and the Lake Huron Workshop focusing on Indicators (January 2002). The Lake Huron Conference brought together a broad bi-national coalition of individuals representing government, industry, and community groups to initiate efforts to identify priority issues and future efforts needed to ensure a sustainable Lake Huron Watershed. Participants from both Michigan and Ontario, including representatives of both federal governments, attended the Lake Huron Workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to develop an action agenda for addressing Lake Huron and to help identify priority issues and future efforts needed to ensure a sustainable Lake Huron watershed. The Lake Huron Stakeholders Workshop brought together almost 100 stakeholders representing local, state, federal and tribal interest to discuss key issues and identify priority actions. The most recent Lake Huron Workshop focused on identifying potential indicators and assisted in identifying additional actions needed to protect and the restore Lake Huron ecosystem.

The Lake Huron Initiative efforts have resulted in the agreement that the immediate future efforts should focus on two issues:

- Critical pollutants/use impairments
- Fish and wildlife habitat and biodiversity

As a result of the workshops/conferences and other continuing efforts, it was agreed that the purpose of the Lake Huron effort (derived, in part, from the Great Lake Water Quality Agreement) would be:

***to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the waters, tributaries, and nearshore terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems of Lake Huron.***

Also, the Lake Huron Initiative efforts have resulted in the agreement that the continuing effort was to be described as the Lake Huron Initiative. With this in mind, the participants agreed that the Lake Huron Initiative effort would focus on:

- identification of data needs,
- identification of actions (on going and future),
- funding resources,
- stakeholder identification and
- sustaining an internationally coordinated group of stakeholders to maintain or improve the waters and nearshore lands of Lake Huron.

The Lake Huron Initiative Steering Committee was created and consists of the following individuals:

- Janette Anderson, Environment Canada
- Sharon Baker, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
- Jim Bredin, Michigan Office of the Great Lakes
- Geoff Peach, Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation
- David Reid, Great Lakes Fishery Commission's Lake Huron Technical Committee
- John Schrouder, Great Lakes Fishery Commission's Lake Huron Lake Committee
- Vicki Thomas, U. S. Environmental Protection Agency-Great Lakes National Program Office

In October 2000 the Lake Huron Initiative participated in the State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference 2000 by providing the audience with a general overview of the current environmental conditions in the lake and by hosting a breakout session to help identify potential Lake Huron indicators.

In March 2001 through the joint efforts of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission - Lake Huron Committee and the Lake Huron Initiative, the Lake Huron State of the Lake Symposium was held in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. The State of the Lake Symposium addressed both environmental and fisheries issues regarding Lake Huron. The results of the Symposium are included in this update of the Action Plans.

The Lake Huron Initiative web site provides summaries of most of these meeting and provides sources of information regarding Lake Huron and specific activities within the watershed. The Lake Huron Initiative web site can be accessed at <http://www.deq.state.mi.us/lhi/>.