

The League of Women Voters
LAKE ERIE BASIN COMMITTEE PROGRAM

Effective July 16, 2014

OVERVIEW ▪ The LWV Lake Erie Basin Committee (LEBC) Program consists of goals and positions that are adopted by a consensus process that culminates at the LEBC Annual Meeting in July in odd numbered years. Working within the LWVUS Natural Resources Position on Environmental Protection and Pollution Control, the LEBC Program serves as the basis for recommending action to LEBC Leagues.

LWV LAKE ERIE BASIN COMMITTEE PROGRAM

THE GOALS

The goals of the LWV Lake Erie Basin Committee are:

- To preserve and restore Lake Erie and its tributaries through pollution control, abatement and prevention;
- To improve planning and management of water and related land resources; and
- To achieve the objectives of the 2012 US-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and the 2008 Great Lakes Compact.

THE POSITIONS

Six positions adopted by the LWV Lake Erie Basin Committee:

Position on Water Resources and Water Quality - 1967

1. Support of public understanding and participation in decision-making as essential elements of responsible and responsive management of our natural resources.
2. Support of potable, swimmable, fishable domestic water supply as highest priority use of Lake Erie's water.
 - a. Improved municipal and industrial waste treatment; treatment of all water discharged into Lake Erie from municipal and industrial sources; monitoring water quality; and adequate training for operating personnel.
 - b. Control of run-off from community development, agricultural and highway use.
 - c. Prohibition of solid waste disposal in Lake Erie and its tributaries.
3. Support of improved coordination and regional cooperation between the United States and Canada; planning and administration along watershed lines and across political boundaries; and modernization and enforcement of legislation and regulations at all levels of government.
4. Support of emphasis on the prevention of water pollution from all sources: air, land use, agricultural, dredging, dredge disposal, wastes, and nuclear and hazardous materials.
5. Support of education, recognizing all environmental problems are interrelated, conservation is an environmental principle, and many jurisdictions are involved - international, national, state and local.
6. Support of adequate financing for pollution abatement, including incentives to governments and industries.

The Natural Resources position of the LWVUS calls for promotion of an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest by recognizing the interrelationships of air quality, energy, land use, waste management and water resources.

Position on Phosphate Detergent Ban - 1969

1. Support of reduction of phosphate usage for the following reasons:
 - a. Excessive phosphate loading is a major factor in eutrophication of Lake Erie.
 - b. Too great a loading of nutrients into a natural water system can affect all the biota in the system. Increased nutrients result in increased growth of plants, creating dense shade, causing death of vegetation. Decomposition of dying plants depletes dissolved oxygen resulting in the absence of fish and aquatic life.
 - c. Costs of phosphate removal at municipal treatment plants are high.
 - d. Reduction in the amount of phosphate improves the treatment process in terms of more efficient settling, sludge disposal and energy conservation.

Position on Drilling for Gas and/or Oil in Lake Erie - 1969

1. Support of a ban on drilling for gas and oil in Lake Erie for the following reasons:
 - a. Lake Erie's use for drinking water supply must have priority over all other uses.
 - b. Possible economic benefits are offset by inescapable risks of further degradation of water quality in the lake.
 - c. Resolving our nation's energy problem must begin with elimination of waste and over-consumption; more efficient utilization of fuels currently being produced; and in the safe, orderly development of alternate energy sources, particularly wind and sun power.
 - d. Lake Erie oil and gas reserves ought to be the very last such reserves to be developed, if ever.

Position on Interbasin Transfer of Water - 1985-1986

Interstate and interbasin transfers of water have been made in the past to serve municipalities, industries, energy development, and agriculture. However, approval of those transfers was based on less complete information about their effects on aquatic ecosystems than is now available. It is inevitable that requests for such transfers will be made in the future and will require carefully considered responses. However:

- a. Construction costs of large scale water transfers are high, and economic losses in the basin of origin may also be high;
- b. Environmental costs of water transfers may include quantitative and qualitative changes in lake levels adversely affecting wetlands and fisheries and wildlife, diminishing aquifer recharge, and reducing stream flows;
- c. Lowered water tables may affect ground water quality and cause land subsidence.

Therefore, any diversion plan:

- a. Must include an understanding of the fragility and recognize the incomplete knowledge of the ecologic, economic, and social nature of the area of origin, the area through which the water must pass, and the receiving area;
- b. Must contain methods for reviewing and adapting the plan to protect the affected areas during all stages of development, operation, termination, and post-termination of the interbasin transfer.

As we look to the future, water transfer decisions will need to incorporate the high costs of moving water, the limited availability of unallocated water, and the impacts on the affected ecosystems. LEBC believes that the criteria for evaluating both the decision-making process and the suitability of a proposed interbasin transfer of water should include:

1. Ample and effective opportunities for informed public participation in the formulation and analysis of proposed projects;
2. Evaluation of all economic, social, and environmental impacts in the basin of origin, the receiving area, and any area through which the diversion must pass, so that decision makers and the public have adequate information on which to base their conclusions;
3. Evaluation of all short and long term economic costs including, but not limited to, construction, delivery, operation, maintenance, and market interest rate;
4. Examination of alternatives including, but not limited to, supply options, water conservation, water pricing, and reclamation;
5. Participation and review by all affected governments;
6. Accord with international treaties;
7. Procedures for resolution of intergovernmental conflicts;
8. Responsibility for funding to be borne primarily by the user with no federal subsidy, loan guarantees, or use of the borrowing authority of the federal government unless the proposal is determined by all levels of League to be in the national interest;
9. An enforceable intergovernmental agreement with supervision separate from implementation and with assurances that any mitigation offered to alleviate any adverse impacts be financed by those who benefit.

As the waters of the Great Lakes basin are interconnected, the present and future condition of the Great Lakes ecosystem should be a primary consideration when weighing the water needs of other areas. Therefore:

10. Water conservation should be a goal of all concerned governments in the Great Lakes Region;

11. All concerned governments in the Great Lakes Region should have water accounting systems and should adopt water use plans as a basis for prudent management of the Great Lakes;
12. The Great Lakes Compact bans diversions of Great Lakes water to points outside the Great Lakes basin, with limited exceptions, and requires the use of conservation programs within the basin. The Great Lakes basin is defined by the five lakes and land that drains into them. Eight states and two Canadian provinces have land in the basin.
13. Canadian interests must be considered in Great Lakes resource decision-making. At a minimum, existing mechanisms for these international discussions, such as the International Joint Commission, and ad hoc technical task forces should be strengthened;
14. Because the Great Lakes are international, future investment and development in the region should include cooperative United States-Canadian management of the water resource;
15. Since the Great Lakes waters are currently used for multiple and competing purposes, any proposals for additional diversions must take into account the impact on ecological, economic, aesthetic, navigational, energy generation, national security, and general welfare values.

[In 1986, Lake Michigan Interleague Group asked LWV Ohio to concur with its position on Interbasin Transfer of Water. A study packet was sent to Ohio local leagues. 79% of Leagues participated and unanimously concurred with the LWVUS and LMILG positions. The foregoing positions on Interbasin Transfer of Water were adopted by LWVO, May 1987. In 2013 the Great Lakes Ecosystem Position was adopted by the state Leagues of the eight Great Lakes states by concurrence with LWV Lake Michigan.]

Nuclear Issues – Power Plants and Radioactive Waste - 1990

The Lake Erie Basin Committee will follow the most recent LWVUS guidelines in “Impact on Issues” (Natural Resources Position, Nuclear Issues guidelines and criteria.)

Position on Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations - 2007, 2011

1. Support of a precautionary moratorium on all new or expanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) that produce untreated animal waste;
2. Support of the improvement of wastewater transportation, delivery, and treatment systems on each CAFO site within the Great Lakes watershed so that regulation of these systems is
 - a. at least as stringent as the U.S. federal or Canadian provincial water quality mandates and standards required of municipalities producing the same volume of human waste;
 - b. applied to all medium and large livestock operations;
 - c. inclusive of safe nutrient management practices and disposal of sludge in the requirements in order to maintain adequate water quality standards in ground and surface waters.

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