

# **Towards Preventive Measures: Focus on Other “Areas of Concern”**

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With the designation of nearshore degraded “areas of concern” in the Great Lakes by the International Joint Commission in 1985, the focus of much subsequent attention has gone into multi-stakeholder processes to prepare comprehensive remedial action plans for the 43 areas in the Great Lakes. Concurrently, however, academic interest became devoted to identifying nearshore and coastal areas of high ecological value because of their biodiversity or their habitat value for fish and waterfowl species which use these areas during critical stages in their life, or seasonal cycle.

Following exploratory studies in the late 1980s, arrangements were made between The Nature Conservancy (U.S.) and the Nature Conservancy of Canada to develop “The Great Lakes Biodiversity Data System” which uses the same format for recording critical elements of biodiversity in each of the eight states and two provinces surrounding the Great Lakes. A number of the sites identified in this system have been protected to some degree under the approximately 20 legal and/or policy provisions presently in use by the main jurisdictions. But in a large number of cases, some additional measures would be required either to secure core sites, or to provide for external buffers to help protect them more effectively.

Similar multi-stakeholder processes to those underway for the remedial action plans are required to achieve this. In addition, as the principles of landscape ecology and conservation biology become more widely known and accepted, organizational provisions for relating the conservation values of such core protected areas to the need for compatible land and water management practices in the areas surrounding them have to be developed. The UNESCO biosphere reserve concept can guide this; the experience of developing the Long Point Biosphere Reserve on the north shore of Lake Erie serves as an example. There is considerable potential for more extensive applications of this concept in the Great Lakes, in part to relate core sites as reference areas and monitoring sites for Great Lakes programs and to develop them as locations for research and education which reflect an ecosystem approach.