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New Report: Region Planning for Climate Change to Protect Great Lakes, People, Wildlife

National Wildlife Federation report chronicles successful strategies to adapt to warming temperatures.

ANN ARBOR, MICH. (October 29, 2010) — To combat the impacts of rising temperatures caused by global warming, communities across the region have begun putting in place strategies to protect people, wildlife and the Great Lakes, according to a report released today by the National Wildlife Federation.

“Rising temperatures and more severe storms are already having profound impacts on people, wildlife and communities,” said **Melinda Koslow, regional campaign manager of the National Wildlife Federation’s Great Lakes Regional Center**. “For the first time, we are seeing communities adopting innovative strategies to safeguard from climate change our economy, public health, quality of life and natural resources like the Great Lakes.”

The Great Lakes region is already feeling the effects of a warming planet: Lake Superior is the fastest warming fresh-water body in the world, extreme rain taxes sewer systems and birds fly south at a later date than usual.

The new report, “Improving the Odds: Using Climate-Readiness to Reduce the Impacts of Climate Change on the Great Lakes Ecosystem,” documents the burgeoning efforts of cities, businesses, scientists and resource managers to craft strategies to adapt to rising temperatures.

The report comes in the midst of an historic national investment in Great Lakes restoration as part of the \$475 million Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Rehabilitating the resiliency of the Lakes by restoring habitat, cleaning up of toxic pollution, stopping sewage overflows and shutting the door on invasive species will help mitigate the impacts of a warming climate. Increasingly, the report notes, such efforts will include climate-ready strategies.

“Being ready for effects of climate change is emerging as the next step for Great Lakes protection,” said Koslow. “Confronting climate change will require the nation to enact a clean energy plan that reduces global warming pollution, but there is more to the story: We need to help the Great Lakes and our communities adapt to the changes in climate we’re already experiencing and that will get worse.”

The report chronicles a diverse set of case studies—from the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, where safety issues from thinning ice on the seasonal Madeline Island Ice Road over Lake Superior will require the implementation of a public warning system and emergency plan, to Milwaukee, Wis., where city managers, scientists and public health managers are collaborating to update the city’s sewer system based on the impact different climate and weather scenarios will have on the system.

The report notes that while cities such as Chicago, Milwaukee, Wis., Toronto, and Quebec City, Canada, have crafted city-wide adaptation plans, more needs to be done.

“Cities, public health officials and resource managers are starting to take action to cope with the impacts of climate change,” said Koslow. “This type of action will protect our investments – and they don’t necessarily require new sources of funding, but rather spending what we have in a smarter way.”

The report calls for the widespread adoption of so-called “climate-ready” strategies.

“This report underscores the fact that we have solutions to the problems facing our Great Lakes and our communities,” said Koslow. “It is now time to act, before the problems get worse and the solutions get more costly.”

The National Wildlife Federation is America's largest conservation organization inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future.

For more information, visit: www.nwf.org/greatlakes

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