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A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes fisheries: A cooperative regime in a multi-jurisdictional setting

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Two nations, eight states, the province of Ontario, two U.S. intertribal authorities, and the binational Great Lakes Fishery Commission all play a role in managing the Great Lakes fishery. No overarching institution has the authority to compel cross-border cooperation. Rather, the fishery agencies adhere to A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries, a voluntary, multi-jurisdictional agreement signed in 1981. This article provides a brief overview of the roles and responsibilities of the management jurisdictions and describes how the Joint Strategic Plan helps agencies cooperate across jurisdictional boundaries. The plan relies on four strategies—consensus, accountability, information sharing, and ecosystem management—to foster cooperation, and to operationalize collective action on both lake and technical committees. The plan is a model for multi-jurisdictional cooperation in a politically fragmented region.

Keywords: Governance, institutions, cooperation, ecosystem management

Introduction

The Great Lakes are both biologically and politically complex. These complexities, which include the inter-relationships among aquatic species and governments, make fishery management an inexact and difficult process. The development and implementation of fishery policies—particularly policies that are needed to manage shared species—are a major challenge because of the large number of management jurisdictions. Voluntary inter-jurisdictional cooperation is essential as each province, state, and U.S. tribe has authority over its portion of the Great Lakes fishery. Cooperation allows fishery managers to leverage resources, better understand all available information, and undertake fishery management on a lakewide or basinwide level; the requisite level, as fish migrate across political jurisdictions. Cooperation also prevents agencies from working at cross purposes or undermining each others’ initiatives.

The history of Great Lakes fishery management is one of parochialism. Starting in the mid-1800s and continuing to the mid-twentieth century, the several agencies attempted, and failed repeatedly, to establish a robust mechanism to help them coordinate policies and implement actions strategically. Even after the Great Lakes Fishery Commission established multi-jurisdictional lake committees in the 1960s, the agencies still did little more then keep each other abreast of their individual activities. It was not until the agencies developed and signed A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries in 1981 that a strategic means emerged to manage the Great Lakes fishery across political boundaries.

This paper provides a brief overview of the roles and responsibilities of the various fishery
management jurisdictions in the Great Lakes region. It describes the Joint Strategic Plan as a tool to help the agencies develop and implement shared policies, and discusses the strategies to facilitate collective action.

The three pillars of Great Lakes fishery management

Contemporary fishery management, say Krueger and Decker (1999, p. 31), “incorporates not only scientific understanding about fisheries and their habitats but also considers economics, aesthetics, user attitudes and desires, and the interests of environmentalists and the general public.” Moreover, for management to be effective, the various governmental jurisdictions must be empowered to integrate policies relating to all elements of the ecosystem. Those elements include traditional fishery management practices like harvest controls and stocking, and efforts from other disciplines like habitat protection and improvement, water quality and use, land use, aquatic invasive species, and biodiversity.

Two nations, eight states, the province of Ontario, two U.S. intertribal authorities, and the binational Great Lakes Fishery Commission all have roles in managing the Great Lakes fishery. The jurisdictional authorities coalesce into three complementary pillars (Figure 1): (1) The non-federal governments (states, the province of Ontario, and the two U.S. intertribal agencies); (2) the federal governments; and (3) the U.S.-Canadian Great Lakes Fishery Commission. The role of each level of government overlaps little with those of the other levels, and no single governmental authority has the responsibility over all elements of the Great Lakes ecosystem. The Joint Strategic Plan helps officials integrate their otherwise fragmented work into a coherent approach to Great Lakes fishery management.

Pillar 1: Provincial, state, and U.S. tribal management authority

Primary management authority rests on the first pillar: the states, the province, and two U.S. intertribal agencies. This non-federal management
authority has been long-established through common law, constitutional authority, and court cases. In Canada, the provinces own the fish in their waters, though the British North America Act (BNA, the Canadian Constitution) grants inland fishery management authority to both the provinces and the federal government (Ollivier, 1962; Thompson, 1974). As such, a cooperative arrangement between the two levels of government has emerged whereby the province of Ontario establishes fishery regulations and then refers most of the regulations to the federal government for assent. The federal government incorporates those regulations into the federal Fisheries Act and the province of Ontario then implements the regulations (Dochoda, 1999; Gibson, 1973; Lamb and Lybecker, 1999; Piper, 1967; Rideout and Ritter, 2002; Thompson, 1974). Commercial fishing harvest in the Canadian waters of the Great Lakes is regulated by individual transferable quotas. Such regulations are viewed as strictly a property issue and, therefore, do not require federal approval (Brown et al., 1999). This arrangement, while complex, has been largely amenable to both sides and allows for the two levels of government to operate under the unique situation that the BNA allows (Gibson, 1973).

The province of Ontario maintains responsibilities over many other aspects of the Great Lakes ecosystem including protecting water quality, preventing invasive species, and addressing land use issues. As discussed below, the Canadian federal government relies on federally legislated mandates to be involved in these and other areas as well. The major mechanism for the province of Ontario and the Canadian federal government to work together in integrating management is the Canada-Ontario Agreement (COA). COA establishes shared policies between the two levels of government, outlines management strategies, and delineates the federal and provincial roles and responsibilities (Anonymous, 2002). The agreement also commits resources from the two levels of government to fulfill the agreement. For example, the COA of 2002 called upon Canada and Ontario to “[Rehabilitate] aquatic and riparian habitat leading to the reestablishment of fish and wildlife populations.” As such, Canada pledged to help in the development of Habitat Management Strategies and Ontario was to develop lakewide and regional fish community objectives and provide technical support.

In Canada, invasive species are addressed at the provincial and federal levels, and several statutes and initiatives, including the Alien Invasive Species Strategy for Canada (Anonymous, 2004), the National Code for Introductions and Transfers of Aquatic Organisms (Anonymous, 2003), Ontario Fisheries Regulations (Government of Ontario, 1997), Ontario’s Biodiversity Strategy (Anonymous, 2005), federal ballast water regulations in the Shipping Act (Government of Canada, 2001), the Fisheries Act (Government of Canada, 2004) and COA (Anonymous, 2002) together evaluate proposed transfer of organisms before the transfer takes place, establish strategies for controlling nuisance species, and authorize regulations. All of these invasive species initiatives depend on cooperation between the federal and provincial governments for implementation.

In the United States, the states and the tribes have a well-established authority to manage fish and wildlife, particularly the non-migratory animals that remain entirely within their boundaries (Nielsen, 1999; Piper, 1967). One basis for state management authority is how the borders were established originally in the Great Lakes region. While the international border runs through the middle of four of the five Great Lakes (all but Lake Michigan), state boundaries were extended to the international border (Bogue, 2000; Piper, 1967); thus no international waters exist in the basin (Piper, 1967). Great Lakes boundaries stand in contrast to oceanic coastal areas where state jurisdiction ends three miles from the state’s shores. The fact that state boundaries extend to the international border allowed states to deny the existence of federal waters and assert their authority over Great Lakes’ lake beds, waters, and the fish of those waters (Piper, 1967).

Although nineteenth century court decisions based state management on the state ownership of lake beds (Davis, 1896; Dochoda, 1999; Howard, 1901; Killian and Beck, 1987; Otto, 1901; Piper, 1967), twentieth century decisions shifted the focus to which level of government had the enumerated power to manage fish and wildlife resources. As a result of this shift, while states retained their management authority, the federal government was also able to assert its constitutional powers in some areas, and play a role in what was previously a state affair. The 1920 case Missouri v. Holland (Knaebel, 1920) had the Supreme Court upholding the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (USGPO, 1918) on the grounds that the Constitution granted the federal government treaty-making authority; the court allowed the federal power to supersede the state authority.
(Holmes, 1920; Killian and Beck, 1987; Knaebel, 1920; Moore, 1965; Willoughby, 1979). The Missouri case did not deny the fundamental right of states to manage resources; rather, it said that in some instances, the national interest would be more important than a state interest, thus allowing federal involvement (Willoughby, 1979). In 1948, in the Supreme Court case Toomer v. Witsell (Wyatt, 1948), the court further backed away from earlier ownership decisions, referring to state ownership as “fiction” (Killian and Beck, 1987); while the 1979 case Hughes v. Oklahoma (Lind, 1981) essentially ended the state ownership issue, asserting that ownership could not prevent the federal government from exerting its powers, in this case, commerce powers (Killian and Beck, 1987).

Clearly, while state management authority was not revoked, the state claim of exclusive authority based on ownership would not stand if the federal government chose to exercise its powers. In fact, state governments throughout the Great Lakes basin involve themselves in a number of policy arenas related to managing the Great Lakes ecosystem. States conduct biological assessments through the departments of natural resources; they protect and improve habitat and water quality through zoning and permitting processes; and, increasingly, promulgate invasive species regulations (most notably, ballast water requirements), particularly in the absence of federal legislation in the United States.

U.S. tribal authority is rooted in the 1832 Supreme Court decision Worcester v. Georgia (Peters, 1901), where the court affirmed that an Indian tribe is a political power with authority of self-governance (Cohen, 1988). In the Great Lakes region, other court cases, particularly U.S. v. Michigan (United States District Court, 1979) of 1978 and Lac Courte Oreilles v. Voight of 1983 (United States Court of Appeals, 1983), have affirmed tribal fishing rights on and offreservation and have mandated agreements with U.S. states in fisheries management (Busiain, 1985; Chiarappa and Szylvian, 2003; Dochoda, 1999; Zorn, 2003). Two U.S. intertribal authorities—the Chippewa-Ottawa Resource Authority and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission—exist in the Great Lakes basin to coordinate tribal fisheries management. In Canada, the Canadian Constitution, treaties, and court cases have resulted in a complex relationship between the First Nations and the federal and provincial governments in exercising fisheries management responsibilities. While the rights of Canadian tribal fishers is found in treaties and in the constitution, the responsibility to manage fisheries, Indian policy, and Crown lands rests with the federal and provincial governments. Courts have ruled that federal and provincial regulations do not inherently infringe on the constitutional rights of tribes and, therefore, are not inconsistent with either tribal fishing rights or the responsibility to protect tribal rights (Supreme Court of Canada, 1990; Supreme Court of Canada, 1996).

On a day-to-day basis, the states, the province, and the two U.S. intertribal agencies exercise their fishery management authority by establishing and enforcing harvest regulations, issuing fishing licenses, stocking fish, implementing fisheries rehabilitation plans they develop separately and together, carrying out fish population assessment, and protecting, assessing, and improving habitat.

**Pillar 2: Federal capability**

The second pillar of Great Lakes fishery management is the federal governments of Canada and the United States. Even though the states, the province, and the two U.S. intertribal agencies retain primary fishery management authority on the Great Lakes, the federal governments are also engaged in the process. The federal governments play critical supporting roles in a number of areas including research, fishery rehabilitation, and invasive species control. Federal agencies like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Department of State, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration support the common goal of protecting the resource and enhancing knowledge. They conduct important research into the physical and biological systems of the Great Lakes; research that is used by other government agencies at all levels, universities, private institutions, and the general public. The federal governments are involved in fishery rehabilitation through stocking and habitat improvement. Also, the federal governments help control invasive species by working with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to control sea lampreys, conducting research into new invasive species, and enforcing ballast water guidelines to protect from new exotic species invasions.

The relationship between the Canadian federal government and the Province of Ontario in Great Lakes fishery management is complex. Article VI, §91 of the BNA of 1867 lists the management
of freshwater fisheries (which includes the Great Lakes) and conservation as a federal power (Ollivier, 1962). It also grants the federal government authority to protect fish habitat, including water quality. The federal government exercises this authority through its Fisheries Act (Dochoda, 1999; Government of Canada, 2004; Harrison, 1996). This act authorizes the federal government to conduct law enforcement (§5), issue fishing licenses in unlicensed areas (§7), construct fishways around obstructions (§20), protect fish habitat (§35), and promulgate fishery regulations, including regulations governing conservation, harvest quantity, harvest methods, fish marketing, licensing, and inter-provincial commerce (Government of Canada, 2004; Lamb and Lybecker, 1999; Rideout and Ritter, 2002).

In addition to the federal Fisheries Act, the Canadian federal government has several other legislated authorities that facilitate involvement in Great Lakes fisheries. The federal Species at Risk Act (SARA), for instance, calls for provincial and federal ministers to work together to list a species as threatened or endangered; once the species is listed, it is afforded immediate protection on federal lands (Government of Canada, 2002). A recovery strategy—including a management plan—is then prepared and carried out through a cooperative agreement between the federal and provincial governments. Other authorities, listed above, allow federal involvement in the prevention and management of invasive species.

In the United States, federal mandates tend also to provide the authorization for the various federal agencies to conduct complementary activities in the Great Lakes basin, rather than to supersede state management authority. For example, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2006 (originally passed in 1990) authorizes the Fish and Wildlife Service to work with the states and tribes in identifying and implementing fishery restoration projects (USGPO, 2006). The Federal Aid in Sportfish Restoration Act of 1950 (USGPO, 1950) (known widely as “Dingell-Johnson” or “Federal Aid” and subsequently amended many times), distributes funds from taxes on sportfishing equipment to the various states for restoration programs. For states to participate in this program, they must use their fishing license fees for fishery department purposes and they must comply with many other requirements that Congress and the Fish and Wildlife Service institute. The Anadromous Fish Conservation Act of 1965 (USGPO, 1965) authorizes states to enter into cooperative agreements with the departments of commerce and interior to undertake measures that conserve and improve anadromous fish stocks. The act allows for the federal agencies to contribute up to 50% of the costs of such projects, which includes things like biological surveys, habitat improvement, stream enhancement to promote spawning, and construction and operation of hatcheries. Under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (USGPO, 1973), the federal government can list a species as threatened or endangered, and once listed, the trade, sale, and transportation of the species would be prohibited. Federal agencies would then be required to undertake programs to conserve the species and prohibit activities that undermine protection or restoration of the species, with state laws no longer then valid.

The Tenth Amendment grants authorities not expressly vested in the federal government to the states. Authority over fish, wildlife, and natural resources is not an express power given to the federal government and, therefore, it is retained by the states. While many natural resource issues are multi-state matters, and while the courts have ruled that strong federal powers—such as regulating commerce, protecting habitat, managing navigation and entering into treaties—could overrule state authorities (Zimmerman, 2005), state authority to manage its natural resources, in the Great Lakes region has nevertheless remained relatively intact.

**Pillar 3: Bi-national responsibilities**

A bi-national fishery institution—the Great Lakes Fishery Commission—exists on the Great Lakes and is the third pillar of Great Lakes fishery management. For many decades, cross-border cooperation was irregular, and while many people strongly believed an overarching institution for Great Lakes fishery management would help make the many disparate management policies more uniform, the U.S. states were reluctant to surrender any of their authority to a bi-national institution (Fetterolf, 1980). The destructive sea lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*) in the mid-twentieth century, and the need to control the predator basinwide, ultimately convinced the jurisdictions that a binational institution was warranted. Sea lampreys invaded the Great Lakes through shipping canals and quickly spread throughout the system. Sea lampreys decimated the Great Lakes fishery and significantly
reduced the commercial harvest. Sea lampreys were an international problem (Smith and Elliott, 1952) and by the late 1940s, harvest of lake trout, a key-stone species, had fallen by 99% from the average catch of the 1930s (Fetterolf, 1980).

The Canadian and U.S. Federal governments decided to address the sea lamprey problem through a treaty. The treaty—the Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries (U.S. Department of State, 1956)—was signed September 10, 1954 by the two nations and created the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. Not wanting to upset the defined state, provincial, and federal authorities, the governments gave the commission limited responsibilities. The treaty expressly prohibited the commission from encroaching on other jurisdictions’ authorities, stating the convention “does not change the established rights and jurisdiction over the fishery held by the riparian states, the federal government of Canada, and the Province of Ontario” (U.S. Department of State, 1956). The treaty did give the commission powers to:

1. formulate a research program designed to determine the need for measures to make possible the maximum sustained productivity of any stock of fish in the Convention Area;
2. coordinate the implementation of the research program, or to carry out research;
3. make recommendations to the governments based on the research findings;
4. develop and implement a sea lamprey management program; and
5. publish scientific studies.

The commission consists of four members from each country plus one alternate from the United States. The Canadian commissioners are appointed by Privy Council; the U.S. commissioners are appointed by the President and do not require Senate confirmation. The treaty allows the commission to operate independently of any federal, provincial, state, or tribal agency and, in fact, the commissioners actively manage the program and are accountable to the Privy Council and the President for their performance. Despite this independence, the convention does urge (though does not mandate) the commissioners to use existing government agencies in the discharge of its duties. As such, the commission contracts its on-the-ground sea lamprey control program to Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The commission also works in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey for sea lamprey research and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for assistance with the design and construction of physical sea lamprey control structures, such as barriers and traps. The commission works closely with the provincial, state, and tribal governments to ensure that its program is consistent with their fishery management objectives.

Together, the bi-national, federal, and non-federal management agencies approach the Great Lakes from the same general perspective and with the same goals in mind. These perspectives and goals include:

- Using science-based information as an input to management decisions
- Sustaining Great Lakes fish stocks
- Protecting biological diversity
- Promoting balance between predators and prey
- Balancing the interests of stakeholders, including those of sport, commercial, and tribal fisheries, the environmental community, and many others.

The emergence of cooperation

Management authorities are relatively clear, diffuse, and autonomous and, thus, agencies must make an effort to cooperate. Indeed, cooperation is neither natural nor easy, as each jurisdiction has its own management philosophy, its own suite of politics and stakeholders, and its own independent authority to manage in its waters. Prior to the 1950s, the various agencies managed the Great Lakes fishery with little or no formal cooperation (Bogue, 2000; Gallagher et al., 1942). In 1955, the Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries began an era of cross-border cooperation, and the commission’s formation of lake committees in 1964 created an ongoing forum for jurisdictions to share information. By the late 1970s, however, the agencies realized that they needed to be more strategic if they were to move beyond information sharing and become proactive in rehabilitating the fishery. Subsequently, in 1981, the eight states and the province of Ontario signed A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries. Federal agencies also signed the plan, as did two U.S. intertribal organizations in 1989, after endorsing the plan and developing the capacity to participate in the process. The Great Lakes Fishery Commission—at the request of the plan’s signatories—agreed to provide ongoing implementation services by convening
meetings, publishing reports, and maintaining the process.

The Joint Strategic Plan fosters cooperation among the many fishery agencies on the Great Lakes when those agencies, being independent, might otherwise act parochially. The plan calls for agencies to work together to identify their shared goals and objectives and then to take the necessary steps needed to achieve those goals. The plan identifies four broad strategies—consensus, accountability, information sharing, and ecosystem management—to make cooperation occur and succeed.

**Consensus**

Action under the Joint Strategic Plan occurs after consensus among the participants has been reached. The plan defines consensus as general agreement or a shared view. Consensus emerges after all points of view have been heard and when no participant objects to the position taken (GLFC, 2007). Participants generally have a shared understanding of what consensus means. They recognize that it does not mean unanimity or universal happiness. Rather, in the words of a plan participant, “consensus means everybody agrees or chooses not to disagree.” Agencies pledge to reach consensus on management practices that affect each other’s jurisdiction before they implement major initiatives. To help achieve consensus, agencies have developed shared fish community objectives (e.g., Ryan et al., 2003) and, often, operational plans (e.g., Hansen, 1996) to put those objectives into action. Consensus is essential to the process, because the plan is non-binding; members must be comfortable with their decisions, as nothing compels them in a legal sense to implement their agreements. When decisions are reached by consensus, they are decisions all committee members endorse (or can at least tolerate) and, therefore, implementation and adherence is heightened. In the rare instance where consensus cannot be achieved, the Joint Strategic Plan contains provisions for conflict resolution through the Great Lakes Fishery Commission or third parties.

**Accountability**

The plan depends on each agency taking steps to implement the shared decisions. Because agencies have the right to manage their own fisheries, accountability encourages agencies to adhere to their shared objectives and plans. The plan is non-binding and depends on gentle ways to achieve accountability, as opposed to more forceful ways typically associated with binding agreements. For instance, participants in the lake committee process use such things as openness and peer pressure to encourage implementation. Minutes and other lake committee documents serve to communicate actions and decisions to participants and to the public, and therefore serve to heighten accountability. Because agencies pledge through the plan to keep each other informed about their agencies’ activities, members have a way to keep track of who is doing what and whether there is progress toward the achievement of shared objectives. Overall, the plan’s accountability measures acknowledge that the participating agencies remain independent but still have some shared obligations.

**Information sharing**

Sound information is vital to fishery management; all agencies require it. As such, information sharing is a key element of cooperation as it helps fishery managers make consistent and defensible decisions and it allows agencies to leverage resources. Information sharing has not always been easy given that the jurisdictions generate data in a variety of formats and are not required to share data with others. The plan envisions the agencies coming to consensus on the data required for them to develop and achieve their shared goals and then agreeing on which agencies will collect the data. Whenever practical, the agencies also cooperatively collect data. To maximize information sharing, the Joint Strategic Plan calls upon agencies to record, maintain, and disseminate fishery management and assessment data in a standard format and for agencies and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to help make the information available. The Joint Strategic Plan has helped created a culture where information sharing is expected.

**Ecosystem management**

The Great Lakes is a large ecosystem, and fishery management involves more than just the fish themselves. Managers must consider the lakes as systems of interacting biotic and abiotic variables. Managers learned decades ago that they must look beyond single species fishery management and instead consider a myriad of issues that affect the Great Lakes, including water quality and quantity, habitat, land use, invasive species, and other factors. The
The Joint Strategic Plan recognizes the complexity of the Great Lakes ecosystem and calls upon agencies to develop environmental objectives and plans, as they develop their fishery objectives. For example, the Joint Strategic Plan envisions fishery managers working with environmental officials involved in activities like Remedial Action Plans (plans mandated in the Canadian/U.S. Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to clean up degraded areas) to integrate fishery needs and objectives with environmental needs and objectives.

Implementing the Joint Strategic Plan through Lake committees

Lake committees (Figure 2) are the mechanisms fishery managers use to implement the Joint Strategic Plan. Prior to the Joint Strategic Plan, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission established lake committees to help the commission and agencies keep each other informed about their respective activities. When the agencies produced the Joint Strategic Plan in 1981, they expanded the lake committees beyond information sharing to make them more strategic, and thus they became the agencies’ means to implement the Joint Strategic Plan. Today, these committees comprise high-ranking officials from fishery agencies on each lake who meet to address that lake’s shared needs. For example, fishery managers from jurisdictions on Lake Huron—which include Ontario, Michigan, and the Chippewa-Ottawa Resource Authority—meet as the Lake Huron Committee. The committees are the forum for agencies to work together to identify and achieve their shared goals and objectives.

The Joint Strategic Plan facilitates management decisions through a bottom-up process, where management decisions are driven by science generated by field researchers. Lake committee members then integrate science with policy. To foster that design, each lake committee has a technical subcommittee comprising field-level biologists who conduct and analyze research and report those findings to the lake committees. This structure allows the field researchers and assessment biologists to develop a shared understanding of the science, as free as possible from political considerations. Specifically, fish community objectives are developed for each lake that provide a description of the desired fish community, an objective for harvest levels of the important species, and, often, specific plans for how the fisheries are to be rehabilitated. Managers develop the objectives together and base them on science and data proffered by the technical committees. Fish Community Objectives are usually accompanied by specific plans for restoration or how the objectives shall be achieved. Such plans are predicated on information produced and shared through the lake committee and technical committee processes, and reflect the deliberations and consensus among
the members. A Council of Lake Committees—comprising all members of the lake committees—addresses issues from a basinwide perspective.

The Joint Strategic Plan also provides for a coordinated approach to law enforcement. Each federal and non-federal jurisdiction has law enforcement responsibilities, and law enforcement agencies operate more effectively and efficiently when they work together. To facilitate cross-border law enforcement, the agencies created the Law Enforcement Committee, which reports to the Council of Lake Committees. The Law Enforcement Committee develops and implements many law enforcement initiatives such as multi-jurisdictional enforcement teams, uniform efforts to identify and stop the traffic of invasive species, memorandums of agreement on crossing borders to pursue lawbreakers, and combined training exercises.

What does the Joint Strategic Plan not do? Being a non-binding agreement, Joint Strategic Plan decisions do not force, in any legal sense, an agency to act. The Joint Strategic Plan does not establish an overarching, centralized political authority to compel cooperation; thus, the Joint Strategic Plan does not reduce or abrogate the authority of the individual jurisdictions. Finally, the Joint Strategic Plan does not alter federal rights and responsibilities or the jurisdictions. Finally, the Joint Strategic Plan does not reduce or abrogate the authority of the individual jurisdictions. Finally, the Joint Strategic Plan does not alter federal rights and responsibilities or the duties of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

Conclusions

The Great Lakes region is fragmented politically among several independent jurisdictions. While the areas of authority are relatively clear and respected, agencies nevertheless need a way to work together. They do so through A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries. Without a way to cooperate, agencies could gravitate towards their parochial needs and desires. The Joint Strategic Plan serves as a way for agencies to define their shared objectives strategically, combine their efforts, pool their resources, and approach fishery management in a unified fashion. The plan creates a culture of cooperation where management community members expect to work together, and includes strategies like consensus, accountability, information sharing, and ecosystem management to help the members stay committed to their agreement. Cooperative Great Lakes fishery management depends on the agencies remaining committed to this voluntary process. In a region that might gravitate toward the parochial, the plan nurtures a cooperative atmosphere where fishery managers expect to work together and creates an ongoing mechanism to ensure collective action occurs.

The Council of Lake Committees, the lake committees, and the technical committees are clearly the strength of the Joint Strategic Plan. Through these committees, agencies come together to share information, to strategize, and to commit to implementing their shared goals. The processes helps fishery managers from around the basin get to know each other and to develop durable, working relationships, which builds trust and understanding. Above all, the process is rooted in science, as it relies on the work of the technical committees as the foundation for management decisions. While all decisions made through the Joint Strategic Plan must still be implemented by the individual agencies, the consensus-based process helps ensure that policies reflect the managers’ shared will and, therefore, are more likely to be implemented. The Joint Strategic Plan is a model for multi-jurisdictional cooperation in a politically complex setting.

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