

2015-2016



Annual Report

Conference of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers



In 2015, our region's Governors and Premiers launched a new era of collaboration by creating the Conference of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers. The ten chief executives are now united as equal partners to grow the region's \$5 trillion economy and protect the world's largest system of surface fresh water. This new structure fully integrates the Premiers of Ontario and Québec, and builds on more than 30 years of work by the Council of Great Lakes Governors.

Over the past twelve months, the Conference has tackled a diverse and ambitious agenda. This work began with the Governors' and Premiers' 2015 Leadership Summit in Québec City and the unveiling of the Conference's new brand and website. Since then, the Conference has led regional partnerships to grow our economy by expanding international trade and tourism, and clusters including maritime commerce. The Conference has also led the region's work to protect and restore the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence, protect our water supply and combat non-native aquatic species.

The Conference depends on coordination with partners and is always working to help build consistency with other Great Lakes organizations. For example, more than two dozen groups participate on the Conference's advisory committees on maritime transportation and, separately, water management. To foster broader coordination, in 2016 the Conference helped convene a meeting with leaders from the organizations created by the States and Provinces including the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes Protection Fund. The Conference continually strives to leverage regional capacity to most effectively serve its member Governors and Premiers.

Maritime

Since 2013, the Governors' and Premiers' Maritime Task Force has worked to boost the regional economy and create jobs by revitalizing the region's maritime transportation system. This year, the Task Force finalized the first-ever inventory of regional maritime assets and



Photo courtesy of The Interlake Steamship Company

priorities to guide future policy, investment and management. The Task Force also evolved into the Regional Maritime Entity, comprising appointees from each State and Province, to more formally coordinate maritime planning and management on a regional basis.

The Regional Maritime Entity then collaborated with federal agencies, non-governmental organizations and industry stakeholders to develop the first-ever strategy for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence maritime system. The Entity has built a strong regional consensus around the policies, programs and projects included in the strategy. In the coming year, the Entity will help spearhead implementation including federal advocacy.

International Trade

The Conference has developed a creative and successful international trade program that is uniquely boosting regional exports and supporting economic growth. This year, the national organization of international trade educators and professionals recognized the Conference's innovative approach with a prestigious award.

In collaboration with its member States and Provinces, the Conference's main goal is to assist small and medium sized companies from the region seeking to expand international product and service sales. This year, the Conference opened new offices to promote exports in London and Berlin. The Conference now manages a network of ten offices—the most in the organization's history. Member States and Provinces participate on a fee-for-service basis and, since 2011, participation has increased over 80%. Over a thousand exporters from the region receive assistance from the Conference's trade offices each year.



David Naftzger and Zoë Munro accepting the Conference's international trade award.

The Conference also leads multi-State/Provincial trade missions each year to some of the world's most dynamic markets. In the past year, delegations visited Québec, South America (Brazil, Chile and Colombia) and Western Europe (Germany and United Kingdom). The Conference has now taken more than 300 regional companies to 20 different foreign markets.

Economic Development

Following on the Governors' and Premiers' 2015 Leadership Summit, the Conference commissioned and released the first-ever regional analysis of economic clusters. Dr. Christian Ketels of the Harvard Business School faculty led this work which is helping to inform the Conference's regional policy work.

Separately, the Conference is partnering with BMO Capital Markets on a report assessing regional economic performance and competitiveness. The report is planned for release in the summer of 2016 as the first in a series. By regularly producing reports, the Conference will track progress over time using consistent data and methods. These reports will help inform the Conference's regional work to facilitate trade flows, support productivity growth and compete more effectively in the global economy.



Conference Executive Director David Naftzger moderated a panel with Gary Doer, Canada's Ambassador to the U.S., and David Jacobson, Vice Chair of BMO Capital Markets.

Tourism

Through the Conference, participating members jointly market the Great Lakes USA region to tourists in the United Kingdom/Ireland and the German-speaking countries. This year, Great Lakes USA expanded its successful partners program and added four new members-- Mall of America, Traverse City Tourism, Great Rivers Country and Visit Duluth. It also prepared to launch a marketing campaign in the world's fastest growing market, China.



The Great Lakes USA exhibit at WTM.

Water Management

The Conference coordinates the Governors' and Premiers' collaboration to protect the region's water supply and ensure that our waters remain at healthy levels. The Conference serves as Secretariat to the Governors' and Premiers' Regional Body and the Governors' Compact Council which coordinates implementation of the "Great Lakes Compact." This year, the Conference helped manage review of the first application in many years to divert water from the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin to Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Separately, the Conference helped coordinate work across the region to sustainably manage water use, promote water conservation and efficiency, and collect water use information as required by the Great Lakes Compact and the companion Agreement. Collaboration and dialogue is ongoing with the region's Tribes, First Nations and stakeholders.

Aquatic Invasive Species

The Conference continues to lead the charge in protecting the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River from aquatic invasive species. The Conference recently coordinated the completion of a Mutual Aid Agreement to enable the States and Provinces to assist each other to combat imminent invasions. Further, the Conference is helping to develop and implement a pilot program among Michigan, Ohio and Ontario to harmonize State/Provincial AIS regulations. This innovative project is focused on coordinating risk assessment and information sharing. The Conference has also begun analyzing the potential for regional enforcement of AIS regulations.

The States and Provinces continue to take action to prohibit or restrict the list of the Governors' and Premiers' "least wanted" AIS, developed through the Conference. Following the States' and Provinces' lead, and advocacy by the Conference, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service further enhanced regional protections by listing four of these "least wanted" AIS under the Lacey Act.

Protection and Restoration

The Conference continues its long-term program to advance the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence. Building on the Governors' priorities developed through the Conference, and many years of advocacy for large-scale federal funding, the U.S. Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has now delivered more than \$2 billion to the region. Moving forward, the Conference has begun evaluating the Great Lakes brand and how a better-developed brand could be used to help market and build support for future protection and restoration, and for other purposes.

Separately, the Conference helped publicize the commitment by Michigan, Ohio and Ontario at the Governors' and Premiers' 2015 Leadership Summit to reduce nutrients in Lake Erie. Following their lead, the U.S. and Canadian federal governments committed to similar nutrient reduction goals.

Communications

The Conference continues to enhance the visibility of the organization, its work and the member Governors and Premiers in North America and the world. The Conference's ongoing, direct communications connect its work with over 3,000 opinion leaders. Conference staff were also featured presenters at many regional and national conferences attended by hundreds. Again this year, the Conference earned positive coverage in major regional and national media. Among those that have covered the Conference's work are *The Economist*, *USAToday*, *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and many others in the United States, Canada and internationally.



Québec Premier Philippe Couillard, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, and Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne announce the creation of The Conference of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers.