MEMO

$1 Billion Booster for Freshwater Health Campaign

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Working with other organizations across Canada, the Cities Initiative is advocating that the federal government **invest $1 billion in a strengthened Freshwater Action Plan**, a Liberal election commitment which may be in jeopardy because of recent efforts by the government to reduce spending. As part of our campaign, the Cities Initiative is **asking member cities to reinforce this message with the federal government and local federal and provincial elected officials ahead of Budget 2023**.

HOW CAN YOUR CITY HELP?

- Encourage your municipal council to **pass a resolution and send a letter** to the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister (Chrystia Freeland) and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (Steven Guilbeault). The Cities Initiative has prepared templates of a resolution and letter
- **Talk to your local federal and provincial elected representatives** to communicate your support for this campaign and the need for the federal government to live up to its commitment

WHY THIS MATTERS

- A $1-billion investment in the Freshwater Action Plan would **lead to enhanced funding for Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin stewardship**, through budget increases for the Great Lakes Protection Initiative and the St. Lawrence Action Plan
- Without sustained funding from the federal government, **successful programs like the Great Lakes Protection Initiative won't be able to continue** as their funding will sunset in 2023
- The **Great Lake Protection Initiative supports action by municipal and local organizations** that enhance water quality. Increased funding could therefore have enhanced community benefits, as well as supporting local and regional economies
- **Population growth and increasing pressure to develop more housing will exacerbate land and water use pressures** in our region. Significant funding is needed to ensure we are able to address water quality and availability issues to allow for growth
- In the long run, **stewarding our source water reduces the cost of treating water** – helping keep water services affordable – as well as ensuring that water ultimately remains drinkable
- Investments to restore Great Lakes water quality have been shown to **create positive economic spinoffs** (more than $3 for every $1 spent on the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative in the US)

WHAT THE CITIES INITIATIVE IS DOING

- The Cities Initiative was part of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Collaborative that developed the Action Plan 2020-2030, a 10-year, $2.2-billion strategy which outlined 15 key actions to protect the economy and ecology of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River, address shoreline erosion, outdated infrastructure, invasive species, exposure to toxins and beach contamination.
    - Action Plan 2020-2030 in large part serves as the blueprint for Cities Initiative and other organizations' advocacy around the Freshwater Action Plan

- The Cities Initiative is working with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC), the Great Lakes Commission (GLC), the Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters and the Québec Coalition for Healthy Waters to advocate for a **$1 billion investment in the Freshwater Action Plan over five years**
    - As part of its work with the GLFC and GLC, along with the interparliamentary Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Taskforce, the Cities Initiative will participate in a summit in Ottawa in February 2023 to highlight the need for this investment. More details will be shared in the new year.
- The Cities Initiative also:
    - Passed a resolution this summer in support of the ask for a $1-billion investment in the Freshwater Action Plan
    - Provided a submission to the federal Standing Committee on Finance for its 2023 pre-Budget consultations, which included a section on the Freshwater Action Plan

BACKGROUND – *Freshwater Action Plan*

- During the 2021 federal election, the Liberal Party committed to a "strengthened Freshwater Action Plan," including a **historic investment of $1 billion over ten years**
    - The Cities Initiative and other organizations are pressuring the government to **accelerate the funding commitment over five years**, given the critical need to invest in freshwater restoration and stewardship projects, as well as concerns that longer-term funding commitments may be canceled by a future government
    - The original Freshwater Action Plan launched in 2017 following a Budget commitment of $70.5 million over five years was scheduled to sunset in 2022.
    - Budget 2022 committed $19.6 million to sustain the Freshwater Action Plan until March 2023, indicating that the future of the initiative would be communicated at a later date
- In the context of inflation and potential recession, the federal government is looking to reduce spending. According to reports, the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, Chrystia Freeland, has indicated that new programs will need to be funded by budget cuts to other programs
    - A **renewed push for austerity** by the federal government **could put this promised investment in jeopardy**
- The original Freshwater Action Plan funding of $70.5 million (2017-2022) was divided between the **Great Lakes Protection Initiative (GLPI; $44.84 million)** and the Lake Winnipeg Basin Program ($25.7 million)
    - The **GLPI investments focused on supporting Canada's commitments under the Canada-United States Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement** in six particular program areas:
        - preventing toxic and nuisance algae
        - assessing and enhancing the resilience of Great Lakes and coastal wetlands
        - evaluating and identifying at-risk nearshore waters
        - reducing releases of harmful chemicals
        - engaging Indigenous Peoples in addressing Great Lakes issues
        - increasing public engagement through citizen science
    - By comparison, **the United States has invested US$1.8 billion in its Great Lakes Restoration Initiative since 2017** (more than US$3.8 billion since 2010)
- The GLPI has leveraged $2.13 in other funding for every dollar the federal government spent

BACKGROUND – *Canada Water Agency*

- The Government of Canada has also committed to launching a Canada Water Agency to help coordinate federal efforts "to keep our fresh water safe, clean, and well-managed."
    - The Budget also committed $43.5 million over five years and $8.7 million ongoing to create the Canada Water Agency.
    - The government has committed to standing up the Agency in 2022, but there have been no further announcements on the Canada Water Agency to date.
- **The Cities Initiative sees the Canada Water Agency playing an important role in overseeing program development for a strengthened Freshwater Action Plan and in coordinating the rollout of funding.**