

**Testimony of Robin Mullet
Audubon Ohio**

Senate Bill 319

Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee

May 17, 2006

Good afternoon. Chairman Niehaus and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 319, the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact. My name is Robin Mullet, and I am a member and volunteer for Audubon Ohio. Audubon Ohio is a non-profit conservation organization with more than 14,000 members and 18 volunteer chapters across the state of Ohio. I live in Coshocton County, and am a constituent of Senator Joy Padgett, who is a co-sponsor of this bill.

Audubon Ohio appears before you today as an enthusiastic proponent of Senate Bill 319, as it is introduced. SB 319 would ratify an interstate Compact that would protect Great Lakes water in Ohio and the waters throughout the Great Lakes Basin upon which our very own Lake Erie is so dependent.

I also come before you today as a lifetime citizen of Ohio. Although I now live outside of the actual Great Lakes Basin, I was born and raised in Oregon, Ohio in the 1950's. My first nine years, I lived a mile from the shores of Maumee Bay. In those nine years, we rarely went swimming in the lake or to the beach. It was usually full of scum, algae, dead fish, and often smelled badly. Lake Erie was dying. In the years following the Clean Water Act of 1973, hard work and some hard decisions from various sectors of the community brought the lake back to life. In the 1980's and early 1990's, I visited the lake several times, and marveled how clean it had become. Now, once again in my lifetime, we have the fate of the lake in our hands. I have four grandchildren, and one on the way. All of them live in Ohio. Do I want them to be deprived of enjoying this precious natural resource as I was in my youth? I do not, and I suspect you do not either. That is why I am here today.

Why the Compact is so important for the future of Ohio:

Lake Erie is a key economic driver for this state. I know you will hear a lot of figures on the economic impact Lake Erie has on Ohio, but its importance as an economic development tool for the state cannot be overstated. The Lake Erie fishing industry alone earns more than \$300 million a year - boasting the largest sport fishery in the Great Lakes and one of the largest freshwater commercial fisheries in the world. Additionally, the Lake Erie shoreline contributes another \$9.45 billion a year in tourism and travel revenue while supporting 240,000 jobs. In order for these industries to thrive, it will require that the waters of the Great Lakes remain within the watershed and that they be protected.

Ohio shares 312 miles of shoreline with Lake Erie. *It is a crucial amenity for the quality of life for people that live within its Basin and beyond.* Whether you live on the lakefront, are one of the 3 million Ohioans who gets your drinking water from the Lake, or you take your family there on summer vacations, Lake Erie is a vital non-renewable resource. Lake Erie has built memories for families across the state who have enjoyed its recreational opportunities, scenic beauty and extraordinary opportunities for wildlife viewing. In fact, Lake Erie provides some of the best places for bird watching in the entire country with the potential to view over 350 species of birds along its shores. People literally flock to Lake Erie for its spectacular spring bird migration. Bird watching is the fastest growing outdoor activity in America. In 2001 alone, bird and wildlife watching and ecotourism brought in \$1.3 billion, 15,714 jobs into Ohio, and \$81.3 million in taxes for state and federal government.

The responsibility of protecting this resource must be shared with the other Great Lakes states in order to be effective. Lake Erie is the most southern of all of the Great Lakes and is dependent on sources “upstream” for over 85% of its water. The ways in which one state manages the water of the other Great Lakes has a direct impact on Lake Erie. The Compact is a once-in-a lifetime opportunity that has brought all the stakeholders together to protect Lake Erie and the Great Lakes for generations to come. According to the UN’s Millennium Ecosystem Assessment report, Ecosystems and Human Health, over 1 billion people globally now lack access to safe drinking water. Outside demands for fresh water resources are a real and proven threat and the threat will only continue to rise into the future.

Why Ohio should be the leader:

The citizens of this state want to see protections in place. Our membership has responded overwhelmingly from across the state to become active on protecting the Great Lakes. It is an issue that crosses all party lines and demographics. We have received well over 1,600 postcards asking that strong Great Lakes protection policies, such as the Compact, be implemented at the state level. Additionally, there is much momentum at the federal level for Great Lakes Protection. US Senators and Representatives from Ohio are working to bring money home for Great Lakes protection and restoration – ratifying this Compact will show that Great Lakes protection is a priority for Ohio.

Ohio should continue to lead the process by ratifying the Compact, as endorsed by the eight Great Lakes Governors, to protect its own best interests. Ohio has been a leader throughout the long negotiations process that put together the Compact thanks to Gov. Taft and ODNR Director Speck. The Compact is the product of over 4 years of arduous negotiation between the 8 Great Lakes States and two Canadian Provinces. It provides the best thinking and necessary compromises to satisfy the best interests for all these entities. The Compact allows for a uniform and consistent standard to review proposed uses of Great Lakes water. This ensures that Ohio’s resource is not compromised by competing interests in other states. Attempts to alter the agreed upon language in the Compact has the potential to open it up to compromises that are undesirable to Ohio’s interests or even to void the Compact all together.

The time to act is now. Even if the Compact were to be approved today, implementing its measures will take years. Audubon Ohio applauds Governor Taft, Director Speck, Representative Dolan, Senator Spada, and all of your colleagues in the House and Senate who are working hard to make this happen in Ohio. We look forward to working with you and hope you will also support SB 319 to empower Ohio to be a leader in this region for Great Lakes protection.