

Executive Summary

We need to protect Lake Michigan, the Crown Jewel of our environment and the source of drinking water for millions. To keep you informed on the health of the lake, I am publishing our first Lake Michigan Report Card. This Report Card assesses beachwater quality, sewage pollution, mercury contamination, water levels and invasive species of the Lake. It identifies how we can take action to protect Lake Michigan. It identifies how we can take action to protect Lake Michigan. The overall grade of Lake Michigan is a C.

1) On Beachwater Quality our grade is a D.

- There are 52 public beaches in Illinois. According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, we had 579 beach closures or contamination advisories last year.
- Persistent beach closures are a threat to public health and cost millions in lost revenue.
- In response, Congress should enact the Beach Act to improve contamination warnings and assessment to lower the number of beach closings.

2) For sewage pollution our grade is a C.

- More than 24 billion gallons of raw sewage are dumped in to the Great Lakes each year.
- In 2010 alone, 6.5 billion gallons were discharged into Lake Michigan from Chicagoland.
- We need to set a federal date certain to ban sewage dumping in the Great Lakes, backed by steps to disinfect the Chicago River.
- Senator Durbin and I introduced S. 147, The Great Lakes Water Protection Act to set a date to ban all sewage dumping in the Great Lakes.

3) Mercury contamination receives an Incomplete.

- Mercury can transform into a more toxic form, methylmercury, which bio accumulates in fish. When eaten, contaminated fish can cause nervous disorders, particularly in children.
- Great Lakes states and Canadian provinces post mercury advisories for fish for inland water bodies but more data is needed to measure this threat in the Great Lakes.
- The EPA should update its mercury tests annually, to report on the trend of mercury contamination in the lakes.

4) Our grade for water levels is a D.

- Water levels have enormous effects on the lake's ecosystem, boating, navigation and fishing. Lake Michigan water levels declined since the 1990s.
- Current water levels are about three feet below the level of 582 feet 25 years ago.
- For every foot decline from the high, this section was down graded a full letter grade.
- Dredging to support boating and shipping is more expensive at lower water levels. Congress should respond by resolving any disputes holding up the Harbor Maintenance Act.

5) Our grade for cleaning up Superfund polluted sites is a B.

- Polluted Superfund "Areas of Concern" surround the Great Lakes. For example, the US and Canada recognized Waukegan Harbor as such an area after Outboard Marine Corporation dumped PCBs in the harbor.
- There are a total of 43 such polluted areas in the Great Lakes.

- Clean ups began in 1990 and it seems now that the full restoration of Waukegan harbor is within reach.

6) Our last grade for invasive species is a C.

- Keeping out invasive species, especially Asian carp, is imperative.
- Asian carp have not been found in the Great Lakes, but spawning populations are present about 150 miles away and eDNA results positive for Asian carp have been found above the barrier.
- Just last month three consecutive eDNA samples for carp were found in Lake Calumet, above the barrier, which was designed to keep the carp out.
- The Army Corps of Engineers should take every effort to up the voltage at the three electric dispersal barriers as a further deterrent for carp.

Based on all these considerations, our overall grade for the health of Lake Michigan is a C. There have been great strides in the last few years to enhance the restoration of natural habitat, reduce pollution and combat invasive species, but it is clear that we still have a long ways to go.

I will be working to advance the solutions above and I appreciate your help in protecting this Crown Jewel of the Midwest.