



Religious Coalition for the Great Lakes

Save the Great Lakes, Save Ourselves!

By the Religious Coalition for the Great Lakes

“Praised be you, My God, through Sister Water, which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.” -
Canticle of Creatures, Saint Francis of Assisi

The Great Lakes provide 20% of the world’s drinking water. They are at great risk.

The Problem

As we write this statement there have been several incidents that are precursors to the potential destruction of the Great Lakes.

- In August, 2014, there was an explosion at the British Petroleum refinery in Whiting, IN on Lake Michigan. We are assured by the company that everything is fine, but this comes after an oil spill in March, 2014. To this date, we have not been informed as to whether it was tar sands that was spilled into Lake Michigan. BP in Whiting is one of the largest refineries for tar sands in the U.S.
- In July there was an outbreak of phosphorous induced toxic blue algae in Lake Erie near Toledo, Ohio which caused drinking water in the area to be contaminated. It is estimated that over 400,000 residents were affected.
- Enbridge Corporation is trying to transport tar sands by shipping it through Lake Superior and all the Upper Great Lakes. “Wisconsin regulators tabled an earlier permit application for a tar sands crude oil maritime loading dock in Superior after residents objected.” Eric Hanson, Midwest Energy News 4/15/2014.
- The Great Lakes do not stand alone. Rivers flow into the lakes. The Calumet River in Illinois flows into Lake Michigan. Pet coke (Petroleum waste) has been stored along the Calumet River and has been polluting it.
- In July, 2010, an Enbridge pipeline break poured 840,000 gallons of tar sands crude oil into Michigan’s Kalamazoo River. To date, the cleanup is not complete with over a billion dollars being spent.
- On August 18, 2014, documents posted by the State Department shows that Enbridge wants to almost double the flow of tar sands into the Great Lakes region using a pipeline along its Alberta Clipper pipeline (Line 67). (Jim Murphy, “State Department Approves Illegal Scheme for Doubling Tar Sands Flowing through the Great Lakes,” 8/25/14. National Wildlife Federation
- “Tiny particles of plastic have been added to possibly thousands of personal care products sold around the world. These microbeads, hardly visible to the naked eye, flow straight from the bathroom drain into the sewer system. Wastewater treatment plants are not designed to filter out microbeads and that is the main reason why, ultimately, they contribute to the Plastic Soup swirling around the world’s oceans. Sea creatures absorb or eat microbeads. These microbeads are passed along the marine food chain. Since humans are ultimately at the top of this food chain, it is likely that we are also absorbing microbeads from the food we eat. Microbeads are not biodegradable and once they enter the marine environment, they are impossible to remove.” www.beatthemicrobead.org

What Should Be Done

"Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human. Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all of creation." - US Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth*, 1991, p. 2.

- According to the Alliance for the Great Lakes, the U.S. and Canada should enact regulations or pass laws to meet the phosphorous targets from the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Currently the Agreement does not require the U.S. or Canada to do that.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must stop using Nationwide Permit 12 (a process expediting approval for projects like access roads and pipelines that do not result in the loss of greater than ½ acre of waters of the United States for each single and complete project) for long pipelines like Flanagan South in Illinois and Keystone South. Instead these pipeline projects should be transparent, open to public opinion, and be reviewed for compliance with the Clean Water Act.
- The "Halliburton Loophole" that allows a fracking exemption to the Safe Drinking Act must be overturned. Fracking also pollutes potable water.
- Tar Sands and Fracking should be discontinued as ways to provide energy into the future. Renewable energy sources should be invested in and used.
- The American Legislative Exchange Council must be exposed and discontinued. "Through the secretive meetings of the American Legislative Exchange Council, corporate lobbyists and state legislators vote as equals on 'model bills' to change our rights that often benefit the corporations' bottom line at public expense. ALEC is a pay-to-play operation where corporations buy a seat and a vote on 'task forces' to advance their legislative wish lists and can get a tax break for donations, effectively passing these lobbying costs on to taxpayers." ALEC pushes for legislation that is friendly to fossil-fuel production. (www.alecexposed.org)
- Microbeads should be removed from all personal care products.

Conclusion

Water is a requirement for life. Access to water is a right rather than a privilege. When we look at the future of the Great Lakes, we are gazing into our own future. Now is the time to act to preserve the Great Lakes and indeed our own futures.