United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 6, 2007

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman
Environment and Public Works
Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Environment and Public Works
Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Boxer and Ranking Member Inhofe:

Many of the Great Lakes are experiencing dramatic drops in water levels. According to recent reports in the *New York Times* and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, experts expect Lake Superior's water level to reach a record low in the next two months, while water levels in Lake Michigan and Lake Huron have dropped three feet since 1999.

We urge the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee to hold a hearing to investigate the near-historic low lake levels and actions to address the likely contributors. Certainly the Great Lakes are in the middle of a drought, but many experts believe there are other reasons for their falling water levels. We need to investigate these causes and pursue necessary actions to prevent the integrity of the Great Lakes from being further compromised.

Some reports indicate that the recent weather changes in the Great Lakes are not a short-term anomaly. Global climate change may lead to long-term changes in the Great Lakes region such as drought conditions, reduced ice cover, increased evaporation, and rising lake temperatures. These changes need to be better understood so that we can discern whether these weather patterns and associated lower water levels are a short-term or a longer-term situation.

In addition, we need to comprehensively evaluate the regulations and management of the lakes. This should include the International Joint Commission's water level regulation of Lake Superior. Other issues include the erosion of the St. Clair River, water withdrawals, and Supreme Court decisions that have drastically reduced federal Clean Water Act protections for critical wetlands and headwater streams that feed the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes are a national resource like no other. We must heed the early warning signs and take a comprehensive approach to protect the Lakes. The Great Lakes require our immediate attention and commitment if they are to remain a vibrant economic and environmental resource for the Midwest and the entire nation.

Thank you for your consideration of our hearing request.

Sincerely,

Russell D. Feingold

Richard J. Durbin

Carl Levin

Debbie Stabenow

Amy Klobuchar

Herb Kohl