



“The smart growth approach attempts to minimize automobile traffic and its pollution in urban centers by including stores, residences and schools in neighborhoods, resulting in more walking, bicycle riding and mass transit usage than in a typical suburban environment. Pictured:

Retail and housing in San Diego, California on the site of a former Sears store.” (Photo by “Faceless B, courtesy Flickr.”

Major threats include toxic and nutrient pollution, the growing presence of non-native invasive species, and the destruction of critical wildlife habitat. In addition, the region's residents worry that other parts of the country and world facing water shortages will find ways to divert Great Lakes water to quench their far-off thirsts. Also, it remains to be seen what kind of impact global warming will have on the region.

Perhaps the issue that gets the most attention in the region is the menace of invasive species. They arrive via heel, tire, railway and ship, and are profoundly altering the region's ecology. The most notorious case is that of the zebra mussel which, originally native to southeast Russia first arrived in the late 1980s on ocean-going ships via the St. Lawrence Seaway. Aside from outcompeting native species for food, they have absorbed toxic

PCBs dumped years earlier and transferred them up the food chain in being eaten by round gobies (also a non-native species), which in turn are preyed upon by walleyes, a popular sport fish.

Another major problem is pollution itself. Tons of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers run off of farms and into the water every month. Coal-fired power plants spew mercury into the air and factories of all kinds emit other pollutants that all eventually end up in the water. Converting farmers to organic agriculture and cleaning up smokestacks are top priorities for regulators and green groups in the region.

Federal, state and local authorities and nonprofit and community groups are working diligently to help restore compromised areas in the region. The Obama administration's 2010 budget allocates \$475 million to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Led by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Initiative is assessing the threats to the region and laying out a roadmap for remediation through the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, which includes representatives from the EPA as well as the departments of State, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development.

Some of the beneficiaries of this funding will also be some of the 100+ nonprofit and community groups that have formed the Healing Our Waters Great Lakes Coalition. These groups hope to leverage each others' expertise and work together on on-the-ground restoration projects throughout the region.

Meanwhile Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, Quebec and Ontario have come together as the Great Lakes Basin Compact to ward off drought-stricken far-off places from taking fresh water out of their region. Member states and provinces have delineated a border around the region beyond which water cannot be shipped. The agreement came about in 2005 when a Canadian company announced that it wanted to ship water in tankers from Lake Ontario to Asia.

CONTACTS: Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, www.epa.gov/glnpo; Healing Our Waters Great Lakes Coalition, www.healthy-lakes.org; Great Lakes Basin Compact, www.glc.org/about/glbce.html.

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EarthTalk®
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EarthTalk: What are the major threats to the Great Lakes in the United States and what's being done to address them?
-- Saul G. Racine, WI

The Great Lakes watershed is a unique and important ecosystem that encompasses some 95 percent of America's fresh water surface area, and is a natural hub for birds, fish and other wildlife. According to the National Audubon Society, the Great Lakes provide habitat for some 400 bird species. The region's exploding human population—now at 42 million—has created many environmental problems.

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Liberal Justice

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Thus, our support for Holder becomes a vehicle for intervening in that decision to bring some balance to a right-of-center debate and to represent the interests of the people that Obama says must be reflected on the Supreme Court. In other words, we have to help make him put as progressive a person on the Court as possible. Intervention is very important because the absence of Stevens will ironically weaken the liberal or progressive stance on the Court because a junior person will not have the status to negotiate a vote away from the conservative bloc to create a winning majority for progressive causes.

Since we live at a time when Conservative activists are tolerated and liberal activists are not, it will require a genuine mobilization on the Left to make sure that a liberal is nominate to the Court because "centrists" and "moderates" are untrustworthy in the current context.

Also, since the current cast of prospects emerged from the last nomination fight, if not Holder this time, maybe next.

Dr. Ron Walters is a Political Analysts and Professor Emeritus at the University of Maryland College Park. His latest book is: Democratic Destiny and the District of Columbia (Rowman and Littlefield Press, 2010)

Census

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Census data to identify those communities disproportionately affected by issues such as poverty, unemployment and health care disparities. The more complete the Census count, the more accurate and targeted our policy solutions will be as we work to create jobs.

If you haven't done so already, I urge you to fill out and mail back your Census questionnaire today. It only takes a few minutes. And the confidentiality of your answers is protected by federal law.

As chair of the 2010 Advisory Committee, I can tell you that an unprecedented effort has been made to ensure that we don't have a repeat of the 2000 Census when more than 4 million people, largely in minority, poor and immigrant communities were missed. In addition to a \$133 million advertising campaign, the National Urban League and other civil rights and civic organizations have led a coordinated outreach effort designed to increase Census participation in communities of color.

Another benefit of the Census is jobs. April 1, Census Day, also coincided with the release of the Labor Department's monthly employment report. The report shows that of the 162,000 jobs created during March, 48,000 were Census jobs. While the overall unemployment rate has leveled off at 9.7 percent, African American unemployment remains much higher, at 16.5 percent and Hispanic joblessness also exceeds the national average at 12.6 percent. That is why it is so important that our communities get to the front of the recruitment line for the hundreds of thousands of Census jobs that are being created between now and July. These jobs are primarily part-time, but the pay is good and the work experience could lead to something better down the road. Anyone who is out of work and interested, should contact your local Census Bureau office today. To learn more about Census jobs in your area, click on the Jobs@Census <mailto:Jobs@Census> link at www.census.gov or call the 2010 Census Jobs Line at 1-866-861-2010.

The National Urban League has designated this our centennial year as a year of empowerment. Participation in the Census is critical tool of empowerment that will help ensure that communities of color are not left behind when it comes to government resources. But as the Census Bureau slogan says, "We can't move forward until you mail it back." If you haven't already done so, do it today. To learn more about the Census and the National Urban League's empowerment campaign, log on to <http://IAMEMPOWERED.com>.

Marc Morial is president and CEO of the National Urban League.

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