Legislative update: Measures on ballast water, invasive species and offshore wind energy introduced or passed in state legislatures

By Tim Anderson [1]
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Numerous Great Lakes-related measures have been introduced, advanced or signed into law in the region’s state capitols over the past few months. Here are a few of the bills and resolutions being followed through the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus’ state legislative tracker [2].

* Illinois lawmakers approved [HB 2753] [3], which the Sierra Club describes [3] as the “next step forward in permitting offshore wind [energy projects]” on Lake Michigan. As a result of the legislation, the state will create a regulatory toolkit, develop a plan for siting offshore projects and conduct economic modeling. Earlier this year, a bill was introduced in Pennsylvania (HB 568 [4]) to lease submerged lands in Lake Erie for the purpose of offshore wind energy development. In contrast, some Michigan legislators are proposing to stop offshore wind development and research in their state (HB 4778 [5]).

* Minnesota lawmakers have appropriated $8.7 million [6] for the University of Minnesota’s Aquatic Invasive Species Center, which will research and develop new techniques to prevent the spread of invasive species.

* Bills recently introduced in Wisconsin (AB 155/SB 134 [7]) would fund a new initiative to bolster the state’s management of sea lamprey, one of the Great Lakes most notorious invasive species. According to the La Crosse Tribune [8], the program would be funded with state revenue generated from fishing licenses and a special stamp required to fish trout and salmon.

* Under legislation introduced in Michigan (SB 266 [9]/HB 4495 [10]), the state would revamp its existing ballast water permitting program, which was established by the Legislature during the last decade to combat the spread of invasive species. The existing program has the most stringent state-level regulatory framework in the Great Lakes basin; the proposed bills would relax those standards. A separate resolution introduced in Michigan (HR 135 [11]) calls on all eight Great Lakes states and Canada to use the U.S. federal ballast water requirements.

* Another Michigan resolution, SR 58 [12], expresses concerns about plans to store waste from an Ontario nuclear power plant near the shores of Lake Huron. According to CBC News [13], Ontario Power Generation’s plans have already gone through a public review process; a federal review will take place later in the year.

If you have measures to add to the tracker, please contact Tim Anderson [14]. The caucus also has a federal legislative tracker [15] to monitor important Great Lakes-related developments on Capitol Hill.

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