

I would like to take a few minutes to highlight three areas: First, our success to date, second our severe problems elsewhere, and third, how we manage water quality in our watershed.

Kelly (Kelly Cave, director of water quality division, for the Wayne County Department of Environment) does a great job of detailing many of our successes but there are hundreds more that occur below the radar. We should all be pleased with our successes and reaffirm our commitment to continued improvement.

Our progress toward sustainable development is impressive and remains the foundation of the quality of life we enjoy in southeast Michigan. But our continuous improvement goes unnoticed in other areas of the country.

I had the opportunity to visit Fresno, California earlier this week. While Fresno continues to grow, it is a very long way from sustainable development and it is running head-long toward a crisis.

Fresno gets four inches of rain each year. We get 30 inches. Their crops use about 40 inches of water each year. About half of their water comes from surface water, which is great subsidized by the feds, and the other half comes from groundwater. Their aquifer is falling at an accelerated rate from 50-feet in 1950 to 150-feet today.

It served to remind me why it was so important to enact the Great Lakes Compact. We have no reason to allow communities that waste water to solve their self-created problems with our water.

But before we claim victory and rest on our laurels, we need to revisit our current efforts and figure out how to do more with less.

We have made tremendous progress. We lead the nation in water resource management. But because we are on the cutting edge, we must question the wisdom of regulatory-driven storm water management programs when they have yet to succeed anywhere in the nation.

This is the main point I want to make today is that we are committed to clean water, but the current regulatory programs won't get us there.

The communities in the Rouge River Watershed must recognize their responsibilities to the health of the Great Lakes. With Congress and the regulators focusing on correcting the sins of our industrial past, we cannot forget the impact of what we contribute today. Because of the financial pressure on all levels of government, we must find a better way to meet our responsibility.

In short, we must revisit how we manage storm water – whether from urban parking lots or farmers' fields. By the same token, the Rouge communities, like every other community whose watershed drains to the Great Lakes, must do their part as well. We cannot be satisfied with just treading water. We need to set our sights on making sufficient progress in achieving water quality standards.

The regulatory model defined in the 1972 Clean Water Act did a great deal toward cleaning up our waterways. To make further progress, we must look at the big picture. We must reset our priorities and agree to address our most significant challenges first.

The National Research Council confirms what we already know – Non-Point Source Pollution continues to be the major source of pollution to the Great Lakes and indeed to all of the waters of the United States.

Wastewater treatment plants have spent billions improving their effluent quality. At the same time, they are bumping up against the technology ceiling. Nutrients in the Rouge River (and many other rivers) must be reduced.

Radical changes to the EPA's storm water program are necessary to reverse the degradation of fresh water resources and

ensure progress toward the Clean Water Act's goal of fishable and swimmable waters.

Recently, I proposed to redefine the roles and responsibilities of the cash-strapped Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to shift some of its regulatory duties to the counties and local units of government.

I believe that the appropriate role for the state, given its current financial health, is to identify the top performing communities and fully empower them to implement specific parts of the Clean Water Act.

Under my proposal, the state would retain the ultimate authority but would relinquish some day-to-day control and replace it with an audit function. This would allow the communities to address their most pressing environmental needs without committing resources to generic requirements imposed by the state.

There is no down-side to this proposal because if the municipality fails to make continuous water quality improvement, the state could simply retract the delegated authority.

Currently, storm water and wastewater regulations require separate permits. Different types of permits exist for municipalities, industries and construction sites.

The communities of southeast Michigan have long advocated a single watershed-wide permit. This approach has been endorsed by the National Research Council.

I want to emphasize that the next step in water quality will require a cooperative approach between all levels of government and all stakeholders. It will require regulators to support innovative approaches and it will mean that we must trust local units of governments to continue their progress.

The communities in southeast Michigan have led the nation in water quality improvement. The progress in the Rouge River is unmatched across the country.

We don't need more litigation. We need to make sure every penny we have at our disposal is well spent.

Thank you.