



CANADA - UNITED STATES

Acid Rain

The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement

A Model for Controlling Acid Rain?



Cooperation between Canada and the United States in protecting the Great Lakes points the way for cooperation to reduce transborder flows of acid rain.

Canada and the United States take pride in sharing the world's longest undefended border. One consequence of this extensive contact is that transboundary environmental problems and concerns are a fact of life for Canada and the United States. Given these circumstances, the two countries have created a number of successful mechanisms to manage such problems. The Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 and the International Joint Commission created by the Treaty illustrate how the two govern-

ments can cooperate in dealing with transboundary environmental issues.

More recently, pollution in the Great Lakes provided both the challenge and the opportunity for the two governments to further this process of cooperation and joint management of a transboundary environmental problem. By the late 1960s it had become clear that pollution of the Lakes was becoming a serious problem. Vast growths of algae appeared which depleted the oxygen and effectively choked the Lakes, severely threatening aquatic life. The culprit was phosphorus, a substance widely used in laundry detergents.

While the calls for remedial action

grew louder, it was clear that pollution respects no boundaries and that if the Lakes were to be saved, local and even national action alone would not be enough. In recognition of the need for international cooperation Canada and the United States negotiated the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 1972. This historic document established general and specific objectives, as well as specific programs and measures, to restore and enhance the quality of Great Lakes waters.

Most importantly, however, the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement established a regime of targets and schedules for the reduction of phosphorus enter-