

## BACKGROUNDER

### THE INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION

- The International Joint Commission is a Canada/United States binational organization established by the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909. The Commission, with three Canadian and three American commissioners, met for the first time in 1912. Its mandate is to help prevent and resolve disputes which concern water quantity and quality and air pollution along the Canada/U.S. boundary.
- The Commission must approve applications for the use, obstruction or diversion of waters that flow along, or across, the boundary if the proposal would affect the natural water levels or flows on the other side.
- The Commission investigates specific issues and monitors situations when requested by the governments. Implementation of Commission recommendations made under such references is at the discretion of the two governments.
- The commissioners act as a single body seeking common solutions rather than as separate national delegates representing the positions of their governments. Experts from both countries serve on technical boards for the Commission and carry out the required studies and field work.
- The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, first signed in 1972 and replaced in 1978, commits each country to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the Great Lakes Basin ecosystem. The Commission monitors and assesses progress under the Agreement and advises the governments on matters related to the quality of the boundary waters of the Great Lakes system.
- Headquarter offices are in Washington and Ottawa. The signing of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement in 1972 resulted in the opening of an additional office in Windsor, Ontario.