



Great Lakes Fishery Commission

ESTABLISHED BY CONVENTION BETWEEN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES TO IMPROVE AND PERPETUATE FISHERY RESOURCES

For Immediate Release
June 7, 2011

Contact: Marc Gaden
734-662-3209 x 14

GREAT LAKES FISHERY COMMISSION HONORS ROBERT MACGREGOR OF ONTARIO FOR DEDICATED EFFORTS TO PROTECT AND RESTORE AMERICAN EEL

MacGregor, of Peterborough Ontario, is recognized for building a binational coalition to respond to the perilous decline of American eel populations

ANN ARBOR, MI—The Great Lakes Fishery Commission last week presented Mr. Robert MacGregor, the former director of the Lake Ontario Management Unit for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, with the 2011 C.D. “Buzz” Besadny Award for Fostering Great Lakes Partnerships. Mr. MacGregor was recognized for his work to build awareness of the American eel’s perilous decline and to build the partnerships needed—on a broad scale—to address the problem. Protecting and restoring the American eel requires careful and determined coordination among many state, provincial, and federal agencies, and with industry, throughout North America, as the eel’s range is extensive and the threats are myriad. Those who receive commission awards are first nominated by outside individuals.

The C. D. “Buzz” Besadny Award for Fostering Great Lakes Partnerships is named after the former Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Director and Great Lakes Fishery Commission Chair who was known throughout the region as a statesman, partnership-builder, and respected force for ecosystem conservation.

The American eel is one of the Great Lakes most unique and fragile native species. Declining by more than three orders of magnitude since the early 1980s, the collapse in American eel populations has been rapid and severe. The only catadromous species in the Great Lakes, these unique fish live primarily in rivers and lakes, but migrate out to the Sargasso Sea to spawn. The full-circle journey from larvae to spawner often spans more than twenty years, covers thousands of miles throughout the North American continent, and involves life in both marine and freshwater environments. Unfortunately, American eels are seriously threatened throughout this journey as they are harvested at all stages of their life cycle for aquaculture, bait, and food. Further, migrating adult eels face dams and blockages that prevent access to freshwater habitat, and hydroelectric power turbines obstruct their return to the Sargasso Sea to spawn.

“Given their vast range, managing the American eel, preventing the decline, and restoring their populations are extremely complex undertakings because at least twenty-five state, provincial, and federal governments, as well as hydropower operations, must work together in a highly coordinated fashion,” said Commissioner Dr. Siddika Mithani, the Assistant Deputy Minister for Science at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. “Despite the challenges and the necessity to reach far beyond the Great Lakes region, Mr. MacGregor has invested in and affected new partnerships that span the range of this remarkable animal.”

Dr. Mithani continued: “While an effort like the one underway to protect the American eel takes many dedicated people, Mr. MacGregor certainly stands out among the crowd. He was integral in the development of a bi-national recovery framework that will provide the basis for coordinated decision-

2100 Commonwealth Blvd. • Suite 100 • Ann Arbor, MI 48105-1563

Phone (734) 662-3209 • FTS (734) 741-2077 • FAX (734) 741-2010 • www.glfc.org

making to protect and enhance American eel abundance. He was instrumental in listing the American eel as a species of special concern throughout its range in Canada and advocating that it be listed as endangered in the Province of Ontario. He executed the difficult management decision to close the commercial fishery on Lake Ontario, and he initiated efforts to undertake large-scale GIS mapping of their habitat, which will further enhance stocking efforts that are currently underway.”

Dr. Mithani concluded: “Rob MacGregor has effectively navigated the complex federal and provincial landscape, the disparate laws, and regulations in various jurisdictions, and international agreements. His work has led to effective strategies and the delivery of useful policy and management actions to protect and restore the American eel. The Great Lakes Fishery Commission and the Great Lakes basin are grateful for his work.”

The Great Lakes Fishery Commission is an international organization established by the United States and Canada through the 1954 Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries. The commission has the responsibility to support fisheries research, control the invasive sea lamprey in the Great Lakes, and facilitate implementation of A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries, a provincial, state, and tribal fisheries management agreement.



Great Lakes Fishery Commission Commissioner Dr. Siddika Mithani presents Robert MacGregor (left) with the C.D. Buzz Besadny Award for Fostering Great Lakes Partnerships. The award was presented to Mr. MacGregor on June 1, 2011, during the Great Lakes Fishery Commission’s annual meeting, held in Milwaukee, WI. Photo: T. Lawrence