

The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement: Policy Agenda Change Mediated by Resource Managers

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The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 1972 represented significant change in the U.S. government's policy agenda because, for the first time it specified water quality objectives, such as for toxic substances in the Great Lakes ecosystem. Among the principal factors that influenced this new policy agenda were the state and regional resource managers' institutional philosophies and capabilities. These state and regional experts largely comprised the advisory boards who were selected by the International Joint Commission to study water resource problems for the St. Lawrence River, Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. They produced two key reports with recommendations that fundamentally guided the direction of the binational policy process. The history of the Agreement was utilized to test Kingdon's "policy process streams" model that postulates policy agenda change occurs as the result of interactions among three independent process streams; the problems, politics and policies streams. The research revealed that Kingdon's Model was useful for understanding how state and regional experts moved toxic substance issues up in priority on the governmental agenda, and largely determined the policy content of the final Agreement.