

Director Liesl Clark
Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy
Jan. 27, 2020

Good afternoon.

I would like to welcome our esteemed guests from Japan's Department of Lake Biwa and the Environment: Director General Ishikawa, Mr. Shimizu, Mr. Tanoue, and Mr. Nishimura, as well as staff from EGLE and our Office of the Great Lakes, who have been instrumental in making this event happen today.

I know it's a long trip to make from Shiga Prefecture to Lansing, Michigan, so we really appreciate your attendance here today. It is this commitment that once again demonstrates the long-standing relationship both governments have.

Thousands of miles may physically separate us, but our interests are closely intertwined: preserving water and environmental resources, development opportunities tied to lake economies, and even invasive species.

Water is an important identity for the citizens of Shiga and Michigan, and they are what make us unique. We're excited to continue to work together to show the world the value of freshwater resources and act as a unified example that other states, provinces, or countries can emulate.

It's been more than 50 years since we first entered into this agreement. Through all that time, our focus has remained on being the best stewards we can be for a resource that is invaluable for Shiga and Michigan. I hope our relationship continues to grow for another 50 years and that representatives for both countries are standing here celebrating a century of protecting critical resources, fostering cultural and knowledge exchange, and learning from each other.

With this Memorandum of Understanding that we are signing today, we are deepening our longstanding friendship and commitment to protecting our water systems. We will facilitate dialogue and partnership to promote conservation and restoration of lake environments; pursue opportunities for collaboration through mutual exchange of program staff, information, and expertise for sustainable lake management; and affirm the significance of promoting the value of lakes and reservoirs and the importance of the conservation of these environments to the world.

We are honored to join with you in celebrating our individual water resources and in demonstrating our continued commitment to protecting them for generation to come.

Director General Ishikawa Yasuhisa
Department of Lake Biwa and the Environment
Shiga Prefectural Government
Jan. 27, 2020

I'm Ishikawa Yasuhisa of the Department of Lake Biwa and the Environment, at the Shiga Prefectural Government.

I want to thank Mrs. Clark, Mr. Clift, and everyone from EGLE for this opportunity today.

I'm happy and honored that we could contribute to the over half a century of friendship between Michigan and Shiga through the signature of a historic memorandum of understanding.

Shiga had two things in mind when we suggested this agreement.

First, we wanted to use our friendship to protect our own lake and reservoir environments. Connected through their lakes, the Great Lakes and Lake Biwa, respectively, Michigan and Shiga became sister states in 1968. Since then, we've had many exchanges, including visits from goodwill missions, and we celebrated our 50-year anniversary in 2018.

After that milestone, we thought it would be good to share our experience and knowledge to use in initiatives and programs to protect what our friendship was built on.

Second, we wanted to help protect lake and reservoir environments all around the world.

With the rise in population, pollution, and, of course, the effects of climate change we've seen in recent years, water issues have become an important challenge the world around.

Based on U.N. statistics, there is a strong possibility that 40 percent of the world population – that is, 3.9 billion people – will be struggling with water supply shortages by 2050.

Meanwhile, lakes and reservoirs hold 90 percent of accessible drinkable water reserves on Earth.

And I recently learned that more than 20 percent of that is in the Great Lakes! Or so my last-minute study session tells me.

Considering these circumstances, and what links us, we thought that we should join forces with you to tell the world how important lakes and reservoirs are, and help advance their conservation.

Living near these bodies of water, knowing all of their virtues, protecting them. We think that there are some things that only we can convey.

Mrs. Clark, thank you for agreeing to our suggestion and signing the MoU today.

I also heard that Mrs. Finnell was involved with improving the document, so I would like to thank you, as well.

Finally, I am also so grateful that we had the time to discuss information and opinion exchanges for the next step in our relationship after the signature.

I hope that today's agreement will help us further develop the sister relationship between our two states, deepen the mutual understanding between our people, and be a step towards the protection and regeneration of our lakes and reservoir environments, for both current and future generations.