

Cameron Davis appointed as Great Lakes czar

June 4 2009, By JOHN FLESHER , AP Environmental Writer



This 2007 photo released Thursday, June 4, 2009, by the Alliance for the Great Lakes shows Cameron Davis. President Barack Obama named Davis Thursday, June 4, 2009 to oversee the administration's initiative to clean up the Great Lakes. (AP Photo/Alliance for the Great Lakes, Lloyd DeGrane, File)

(AP) -- Cameron Davis, leader of a Chicago-based environmentalist group, has been appointed to oversee President Barack Obama's initiative to clean up the Great Lakes.

Davis is president of the Alliance for the Great Lakes, one of many organizations that have pushed for a [restoration](#) program expected to cost more than \$20 billion. He was appointed by Lisa Jackson, head of

the [Environmental Protection Agency](#).

"I'm excited, and this is a real testament to the passion and work that so many citizens are doing to put the Great Lakes on the map," Davis said Thursday. He said he couldn't comment further until after beginning his job as special adviser to Jackson next month.

He will coordinate efforts of about a dozen federal agencies working on the administration's Great Lakes project, which deals with issues such as [invasive species](#), polluted harbors, sewage overflows and degraded wildlife habitat.

The Bush administration oversaw development of a wide-ranging strategy for protecting and restoring the lakes that was presented in December 2005, but little funding was provided afterward. Legislation to carry out the plan has been introduced in the U.S. House and Senate.

During the campaign last year, Obama pledged \$5 billion over a decade toward implementing the plan. His proposed 2010 budget seeks \$475 million in new spending on the lakes.

Obama also promised to appoint a management "czar" and settled on Davis, a 23-year veteran of the Alliance for the Great Lakes, previously known as the Lake Michigan Federation. The group advocates for improving water quality and land use, conservation, habitat recovery and clean energy.

Earlier this year, Obama named J. Charles Fox to a similar post, directing restoration of the Chesapeake Bay.

In a statement, the EPA said Davis "will work closely with the administrator and senior staff on Great Lakes issues." The appointment and proposed funding "reflects this administration's commitment to

protecting and cleaning up the largest freshwater lakes in the world," it said.

Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., sponsor of legislation to implement the Obama initiative, said Davis "has shown a commitment to ensuring our waterways are healthy and safe for drinking, swimming and fishing. He has been a strong advocate for protecting the Great Lakes from harmful diversions by establishing sound water management strategy. He understands water policy and the importance of good policy."

Jack Bails, the alliance's board chairman, said Davis had helped put the Great Lakes "on the national radar" by taking their case to federal regulators, members of Congress and other policymakers.

Davis is "a coalition builder," said Jeff Skelding, director of a network of advocacy groups known as the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition. "He knows how to talk the languages of the different federal agencies ... and the audiences that have a stake in protecting the lakes."

One challenge Davis will face is making sure the federal money is used effectively - particularly when the government already has about 140 programs dealing with the Great Lakes environment.

"I would think that would be at the top of the agenda for the person in this position - to take a look at these programs and recommend how they can be streamlined and made more effective," Skelding said.

Another crucial task for Davis will be serving as an outspoken Great Lakes advocate, Skelding said.

"If we protect the Great Lakes, we're revitalizing the regional economy, which has national implications," he said. "We have to be able to explain that. We need to see real action, measurable progress."

Despite his background as an environmental activist, Davis has been willing to consider the region's business interests, said George Kuper, president of the Council of Great Lakes Industries.

"I hope he'll reach out and get guidance on that," Kuper said. "We've worked quite closely on legislation and other things in the basin. He understands the value of multi-stakeholder participation."

On the Net:

Alliance for the [Great Lakes](http://www.greatlakes.org), <http://www.greatlakes.org>

Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, <http://www.healthylakes.org>

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