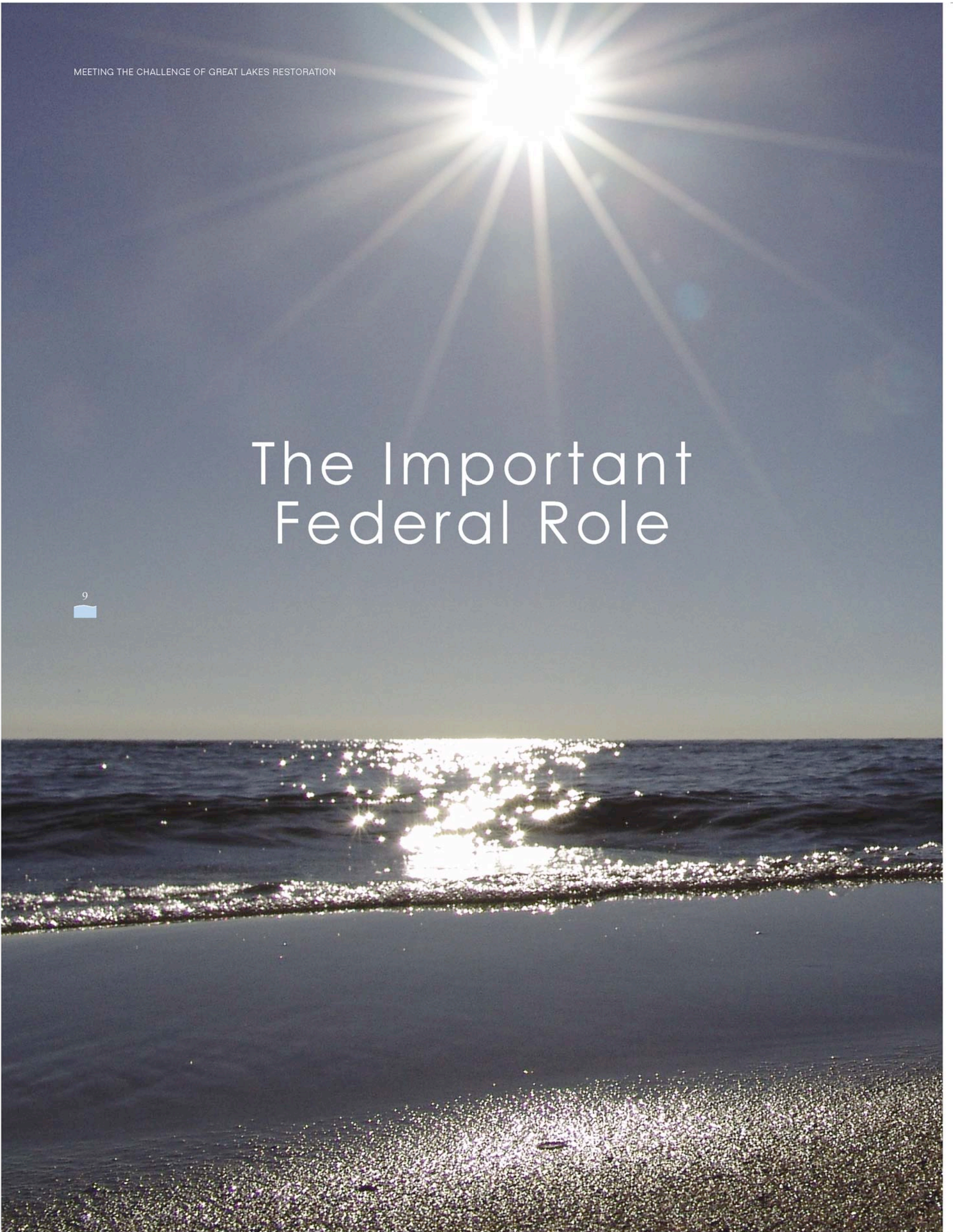


The Important Federal Role



While strong local and regional efforts to overcome significant environmental challenges to the Great Lakes have long been underway and remain vital, no single sustained national effort exists to prioritize, coordinate, and meld the various activities. Eight states, as well as two Canadian provinces and multiple counties and municipalities, share shoreline and jurisdiction in the Great Lakes basin. However, no local or state government has the authority to develop the agenda or enact the sweeping legislation necessary to ensure restoration of all our Great Lakes.

The federal government - in partnership with the states, provinces, counties, and municipalities - is uniquely positioned to play this role. For example, participants in the Healing Our Waters conference recognized the significance of federal government leadership by calling for increased public education nationwide on the consequences of degradation to the Great Lakes and the value of its restoration. Moreover, the Healing Our Waters agenda calls for consideration of creating a "Great Lakes National Conservation Area" within the National Park System. In light of its essential role in Great Lakes restoration, the federal government is the intended audience for this report.

Just as this report does not outline the role of all units of government in the restoration effort, it also does not address all threats to the Lakes. Many environmental challenges beyond those listed in this report threaten the Great Lakes ecosystem. It will take the cooperative and continued effort of committed individuals and organizations throughout the public and private sectors to overcome these challenges.

This agenda does, however, identify several major threats and specify the priority actions the U.S. Government must undertake immediately to heal the wounds inflicted on the Lakes over the past decades and prevent permanent harm to these vital, vibrant, and vulnerable waters.