



April 30, 2009

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we urge you to co-sponsor S. 787, the Clean Water Restoration Act, and vote to pass this legislation this year.

The Healing Our Waters Coalition is a group of 110 national, regional and local organizations working to restore and protect the Great Lakes. The Coalition represents millions of Americans that live near, work near, and love this national treasure.

Great Lakes wetlands and tributaries are important components to the region's comprehensive plan to protect and restore the world's largest source of fresh surface water. As you know, the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration set a long-term goal for restoring one million acres of high quality wetlands in the Basin. These wetlands filter sediment and pollutants that are washed off farm fields and city streets and into Great Lakes tributaries and the lakes themselves. They provide vital habitat to wildlife, waterfowl and fish. Wetlands also reduce flooding by absorbing heavy rains that fall throughout the year. Great Lakes wetlands also create economic value adding over \$50 billion to the region's economy every year.

The restoration plan also sets a long-term goal that rivers and streams be adequately buffered to reduce pollution and sedimentation into the Great Lakes. Rivers are critically important to the establishment of self-sustaining Great Lakes fish communities and other wildlife populations. Adequate natural buffers slow run off, trap sediments and fertilizers and create habitat for endangered species. Protecting Great Lakes rivers is critical to restoring the Great Lakes.

The benefits of Great Lakes wetlands and tributaries, however, are diminished as more and more Great Lakes wetlands disappear and rivers are impaired. Already, the region has lost an estimated sixty-six percent of the wetlands that existed when the first non-indigenous settlers arrived. The consequences can be severe. More polluted runoff dirties the Great Lakes. The loss of habitat reduces the biodiversity in a region that relies on outdoor recreation and tourism.

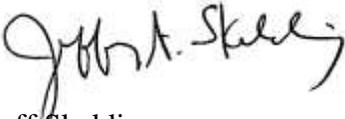
For years the Clean Water Act protected all wetlands and tributaries in the Great Lakes region – those by the shore and those inland. Two Supreme Court rulings and subsequent administrative actions now undermine Congress' original intent to protect all of America's waters and wetlands. The resulting uncertainty over the scope of Clean Water Act protections is also resulting in costly permitting delays and litigation and undermining Clean Water Act enforcement. EPA Administrator Jackson has confirmed that a legislative fix is necessary.

S. 787 seeks to clearly re-state the historic scope of this landmark law. It does not extend or broaden the law or overturn current exemptions for farming or other activities. It simply clarifies that our government can and must protect all waters of the United States.

Restoring Great Lakes wetlands and rivers is crucial if we are to protect the Great Lakes for future generations. Yet, the wetland restoration goals of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration are undermined by Supreme Court rulings and administrative actions that leave existing wetlands and streams vulnerable to destruction. The longer we wait, the more expensive and complicated the task becomes. We endorse the efforts to protect our Great Lakes– and America’s – wetlands and rivers and we proudly add our Coalition to the long list of groups supporting S. 787. We urge you to vote for passage of the Clean Water Restoration Act in 2009.

If you have any questions regarding this statement, please do not hesitate to contact Chad Lord, policy director for our Coalition, at 202-454-3385 or clord@npca.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Skelding". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jeff Skelding
Campaign Director

Chad Lord
Policy Director