



April 15, 2010

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madame Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters[®]-Great Lakes Coalition, we wanted to express our appreciation to you for this Subcommittee's support for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative last year and ask you to again support \$475 million for the GLRI in fiscal year 2011. Freezing funding for this multi-year initiative at fiscal year 2010 levels will accelerate the restoration of the Great Lakes improving our nation's environment and create jobs.

Last year the President proposed and Congress supported a new \$475 million multi-year initiative to accelerate progress in restoring the Great Lakes. As you know, this new initiative puts people to work solving the most urgent problems facing the Lakes. Sustained investment of the GLRI this year will help clean up toxic pollution that poses a threat to people and wildlife; restore wetlands to improve water quality and provide wildlife habitat that is important to the region's tourism industry; and prevent and control new invasive species that cost the region at least \$200 million every year.

This support has united the region, and people are responding. Now is not the time to slow down the progress being made, which is why we were disappointed by the Administration's \$300 million request for fiscal year 2011. Although we acknowledge that senior Administration officials may believe that fiscal year 2010 funding isn't being obligated quickly enough to justify an additional \$475 million for the GLRI, we disagree with that view. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO) has worked hard over the last year with their sister agencies to ensure that FY 2010 GLRI funding can be put to good use this year.

Even with significant new federal support, the need for funding continues to far outweigh what is currently available. After years of inadequate federal investment, there is a tremendous backlog of work that needs to be done to keep pace with the serious threats to the Lakes. EPA, NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation all recently closed grant solicitations on how to spend GLRI funds. Nearly 1,400 proposals were submitted totaling over \$1.1 billion. Only 13 percent of proposals on average region-wide will receive

funding through these solicitations since only \$144 million is available. The demand for restoration funding is more than 7 times greater than available funds, meaning many projects will go unfunded. We are excited that additional agency requests for proposals will be made available throughout the year. However, not all GLRI funds will go to grants and even if those funds did, current GLRI funding would still fund less than half the projects that have been proposed through the most recent RFPs. The bottom line is that GLRI funds appropriated last year will only make a small dent in the backlog of restoration work left undone by years of inadequate investment in this national icon.

In addition to maintaining funding for the GLRI at \$475 million, we also ask you to include the following recommendations in the Subcommittee's House report to accompany your fiscal year 2011 appropriations bill. We first outlined most of these recommendations in testimony that our Coalition submitted to the House Subcommittee on March 19:

- Spend GLRI funds in the Great Lakes basin.
- Ensure that all stakeholders helping to restore the Great Lakes – in particular non-governmental organizations – have a voice in setting Great Lakes restoration priorities.
- Streamline application procedures so non-federal stakeholders can use one application form for multiple agency requests.
- Allow EPA to bundle funding for multiple projects (either by the same sponsor or multiple sponsors) in targeted areas in order to more efficiently direct funds to high-priority areas and on multiple issues (either concurrently or consecutively) and to minimize administrative costs for smaller non-governmental groups that have the expertise to do restoration work but may be too small to manage large federal grants.
- Reduce the number of federal programs receiving GLRI funding to better target these investments at the highest priorities.
- Ensure that a high percentage of research grants funded by the GLRI are available to researchers at the region's colleges and universities.

Lastly, we also urge the Subcommittee to include similar language in the House bill that gives the EPA the authority it needs to manage this program. Although we hope that a permanent authorization can be enacted by Congress, it is necessary for EPA to retain the authority granted in last year's bill to enter into interagency agreements with other federal agencies and provide grants to non-federal partners.

We are poised to make real progress in restoring the lakes. This progress is good not only for our environment but also our economy. The Brookings Institution showed that a \$26 billion investment in cleaning up toxic sediments, restoring wetlands and preventing sewer overflows leads to at least \$50 billion in economic benefit to the region and nation, including higher property values, new development, more recreational opportunities, new jobs, and a better quality of life. The longer we wait to make needed investments in the Great Lakes, however, the worse and more expensive the problems they face get.

We appreciate the tough choices you face as you put together your funding bill this year. The Great Lakes are international treasures. Restoring them will help boost economic recovery in the Midwest and nation. We hope you will support maintaining funding for the GLRI in fiscal year

2011 at last year's level of \$475 million so we can keep building momentum in restoring and protecting the Great Lakes.

Please do not hesitate to contact Chad Lord, our Coalition's policy director, at 202-454-3385 or clord@npca.org with questions.

Sincerely,

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