



## Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition

August 1, 2012

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, DC 20250

*Via electronic mail*

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As a member of the Federal Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, we write to ask that you assure the President's fiscal year 2014 budget proposal provides at least \$300 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The GLRI – and you – have provided the Great Lakes region with much-needed support, and we are seeing on-the-ground results in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. However, while pressures to balance the U.S. budget will not diminish, neither will the urgent problems facing the Great Lakes. If we cut restoration funds, these serious problems will only get worse and the price we pay will be much higher.

Great Lakes restoration efforts are improving the lives of millions of people and work is underway on over 700 restoration projects throughout the region that will measurably restore the Great Lakes and address the most urgent problems facing them. These projects are cleaning up drinking water flowing to millions of homes and thousands of industries and improving infrastructure important for future economic growth in the eight-state region. These projects are delivering results throughout, including:

- In Fennville, Michigan, \$220,000 from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is helping nurse lake sturgeon back to health in the Kalamazoo River after decades of decline. An innovative fish-rearing facility allowed biologists to release 100 sturgeons in the Kalamazoo River in 2011.
- In Milwaukee, Wis., state and federal agencies announced in February the completion of a \$24.6 million sediment cleanup that moves the Milwaukee Estuary closer to being removed from a list of Great Lakes Areas of Concern. The \$24.6 million Great Lakes Restoration Initiative project removed about 140,000 cubic yards of toxic sediment contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PCBs and PAHs. The contamination led to limits on eating fish caught in the river, as well as loss of habitat and other environmental problems.
- In Toledo, Ohio, \$47 million in Federal Great Lakes restoration funds (\$2 million under budget) supported removal of 260,000 cubic yards of toxic sediment, which posed a risk to people and wildlife—including major sportfish such as walleye and perch, along a 5-mile stretch of the Ottawa River. Nearly 260,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment was dredged from a 5.5-mile stretch of the river in Toledo. For decades, the river was a major source of chemical pollutants entering Lake Erie's Maumee Bay, where the contaminants harmed fish and wildlife. Crews worked around the clock to finish the project in six months; it was scheduled to take two years.
- In Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, \$1.6 million of restoration funds, of which \$800,000 came from the GLRI, has gone to restore the Cowles Bog Wetland Complex. Removing invasive plant

species and restoring the natural flow of water is now restoring natural functions to the environment and creating new fish and wildlife habitat at this wetland complex, a nationally recognized natural feature along the Lake Michigan coast, in this national park near Chicago.

More stories on the nearly 700 GLRI-funded projects currently underway can be found at [www.healthylakes.org](http://www.healthylakes.org).

Investments in Great Lakes restoration also create short-term jobs and lead to long-term economic benefits for the Great Lakes states and the country. A Brookings Institution report shows that every \$1 invested in Great Lakes restoration generates \$2 in return, making Great Lakes restoration one of the best investments with the federal dollar in the budget. More recent research from Grand Valley State University suggests that the return for certain projects may be closer to 6-to-1. The University of Michigan has also demonstrated that over 1.5 million jobs are dependent on clean and healthy Great Lakes, accounting for more than \$60 billion in wages annually. We have also seen jobs being created by our nation's efforts to clean up the Great Lakes and restore fish and wildlife habitat. These jobs include wetland scientists, electricians, engineers, landscape architects, plumbers, truck drivers and many others.

However, there is still much work that needs to be done. Aging sewers, invasive species, and toxic pollutants are just a few of the pervasive threats that impact the region, endangering human and wildlife health, lowering property values, and hurting the region's economy. Cutting funding will slow restoration efforts, allowing problems to get worse and more expensive to solve. Ultimately, cutting spending on the Great Lakes won't save money—it will cost the nation more. As the source of drinking water for 30 million people, the nation cannot afford not to protect and restore the Great Lakes.

The supplemental funding provided by the GLRI has been a critical factor in sparking increased restoration momentum. Even with this supplemental funding, however, all agencies still require on-going support for their base Great Lakes restoration programs. Both the Administration and Congress have stated clearly that special funding under the GLRI is intended to supplement, *not supplant*, funding for regional and national programs that support continued restoration of the Great Lakes. In its conference report for the fiscal year 2013 appropriations bill for the Department of Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, Congress reminded EPA and its federal partners that “funds for this initiative are to supplement rather than supplant those funds already being spent on Great Lakes programs by the agencies prior to the establishment of the initiative.” (Found at: <http://appropriations.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hrpt-112-afy13-interior.pdf>). The GLRI Action Plan, adopted by the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force in February 2010, states that “agencies must assure that they continue to support their existing base program activities in the Great Lakes and that added Initiative support will not be used to supplant their existing base funding.”

Progress is being made. Now is not the time to scale back our nation's commitment to restore the Great Lakes environment and economy. We understand that pressures on Congress and the Administration to balance the U.S. budget will not diminish, but neither will the problems facing the Great Lakes. If we wait and allow restoration efforts to slow, these serious problems will only get worse and the price we pay will be much higher. For the economy and the environment, please make sure that the fiscal year 2014 budget provides at least \$300 million for the GLRI and that all agency Great Lakes restoration base budgets are maintained.

If you have questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact our policy director, Chad Lord, at 202-454-3385 or [clord@npca.org](mailto:clord@npca.org).

Sincerely,

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