



Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition

October xx, 2013

The Honorable Gina McCarthy
Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

As the Chair of the Federal Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, we write to ask that you assure the President's fiscal year 2015 budget proposal provides funding for Great Lakes restoration priorities. The Great Lakes region has received 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.

First, we ask you to support \$300 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Restoration efforts are improving the lives of millions of people and work is underway on over 1,700 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:

- The Presque Isle, Pennsylvania, Area of Concern was delisted and the management actions necessary for delisting were completed in the Sheboygan, Wisconsin, AOC. As a result, Sheboygan and other cities have begun debating how to market and develop their cities after years of being pegged as toxic hot spots.
- 21 beneficial use impairments (BUIs) and 12 AOCs were removed, bringing the cumulative removal total to 33, exceeding the GLRI Action Plan target. More BUIs have been removed since the GLRI began in 2010 than between 1987 and 2009.
- The Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, NRCS, and NOAA (among others) restored, protected, or enhanced over 90,000 acres of wetlands and other habitat in the Great Lakes.
- 800 river miles were cleared of barriers resulting in fish swimming into stretches of river where they have been absent for decades.
- Farmers implemented conservation practices on nearly 280,000 acres of Great Lakes farms to reduce erosion and nutrient runoff into Great Lakes tributaries.

Second, the GLRI does not address aging sewers that led to nearly 20 billion gallons of sewage being discharged into the Great Lakes in 2011, closing beaches, threatening public health and damaging local economies. Communities depend on the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) for low-interest loans to implement costly wastewater infrastructure projects that seek to stop overflows from happening. Based on a fixed formula, maintaining level funding for the Clean Water SRF will provide approximately \$500

million for the eight Great Lakes states in 2014. We request that you maintain funding for this important Great Lakes restoration program.

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 draft conference report for the fiscal year 2014 appropriations bill for the Department of Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, Congress reminded EPA and its federal partners that “funds are to supplement rather than supplant those funds already being spent on Great Lakes programs prior to the establishment of the initiative.” (Found at: <http://appropriations.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hrpt-113-hr-fy2014-interior.pdf>; Accessed: 1 October 2013). 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 slow down. 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 2015 budget provides at least \$300 million for the GLRI, SRF funding is maintained, and that all agency Great Lakes restoration base budgets are preserved.

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@npsa.org.

Sincerely,

Cc: Members of the Federal Great Lakes Interagency Task Force
Bob Perciasepe, Deputy Administrator
Cameron Davis, Special Assistant to the Administrator
Others?