



Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition

March 22, 2015

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-305 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to ask that you assure the Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations bills provide 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 on the U.S. budget will not diminish, neither do the urgent problems facing the Great Lakes if we cut restoration funds. Serious problems 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 (GLRI). Restoration efforts are improving the lives of millions of people and work is underway or completed on over 2,900 restoration projects throughout the region that are benefitting communities while addressing the most urgent threats to the Great Lakes. These projects are cleaning up streams that provide drinking water flowing to millions of homes and thousands of industries. Restoration work is improving infrastructure important for future economic growth in the eight-state region. These projects are delivering results throughout, including:

- Three Areas of Concern – Presque Isle, Pa.; Deer Lake, Mich.; and White Lake, Mich. – have been delisted last year. The management actions necessary to delist four additional AOCs have also been completed. In the previous two decades before the GLRI, only one AOC had been cleaned up.
- Between 2010 and 2014, 50 beneficial use impairments (BUIs) at 18 AOCs were removed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, more than tripling the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years. More BUIs have been removed since the GLRI began than between 1987 and 2009.
- Combined with other funding, farmers implemented conservation action on more than one million acres of rural lands in order to reduce erosion and farm runoff that feeds algal blooms.
- More than 513 dams and barriers were removed, allowing fish to access more than 3,800 miles of river.

Second, we urge you to provide at least \$1.45 billion for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and \$1.0 billion for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund. The region's water

infrastructure needs to be replaced. EPA estimates that nearly \$80 billion is needed in the Great Lakes region alone to replace old sewer pipes and wastewater plants. Still more is needed to fix drinking water problems that threaten the public's safety. The problem in urban water systems and in economically disadvantaged communities is particularly acute. Sewer overflows pour millions of gallons of raw sewage into the Great Lakes and lead drinking water pipes threaten the health of these communities. The Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs) are two key sources of funds to solve these problems. Communities depend on them for low-interest loans to implement costly, but critical wastewater and drinking water infrastructure projects.

Third, the threat of Asian carp is real and persistent. To keep Asian carp out of the Great Lakes we support advancing interim, protective measures that 1) lead to a long-term solution that prevents the inter-basin movement of aquatic invasive species between both the Mississippi River and Great Lakes basins, 2) maintain or enhance water quality, recreation, and flood protection, and 3) enable the efficient movement of goods in the region. To achieve these goals, we ask that you match the President's request of \$2.6 million to the Army Corps of Engineers for the ongoing Great Lakes-Mississippi River Interbasin Feasibility Study; specifically to quicken the finalization of the study focusing on Brandon Road lock and dam. We need a design for a new engineered channel and control technologies at this site so our region can move forward quickly with constructing the next line of defense against the transfer of invasive species between the two basins—and ultimately permanent separation. Congress must also direct the Army Corps and other federal agencies -- through both meaningful funding and legislative language -- to take emergency actions to keep Asian carp from advancing on Lake Michigan and move forward with the feasibility study needed to implement an effective long term solution.

Lastly, urban and agricultural runoff continues to contribute to the problems facing the Great Lakes. Experts say harmful new algal blooms are being fueled by excessive amounts of phosphorus washing into the lakes from farms and urban areas. Stronger storms driven by climate change contribute to the problem, as do invasive mussels. New harmful algal blooms close beaches, kill fish, impact local drinking water supplies (such as in Toledo, Ohio, in 2014), and harm small, local businesses like charter boats. The harmful algal blooms are spreading farther and faster and beginning earlier than ever before. Last year's was the largest on record!

To help the region respond to these algal blooms, we ask that you provide continued strong support for Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program. This program is well placed to fund targeted, discrete conservation practices that will improve soil quality, water quality and wildlife habitat in regions such as the Great Lakes. It sets aside conservation funding to encourage innovative partnerships between watershed groups and farmers. As partners, these organizations and farmers work together to further the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife habitat, and other natural resources on a regional or watershed scale. It also provides for accountability by linking the projects to local efforts or other regional initiatives (like the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative).

Support for the RCPP will not be enough to reduce algae-feeding phosphorus in the region's waterways. If we are to achieve 40 percent nutrient reductions in Western Lake Erie (as agreed to by the region's governors and the U.S. and Canadian governments), for example, we will need a much more coordinated response. We ask that Congress provide all Farm Bill conservation programs with funding at authorized levels.

These investments in Great Lakes restoration 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 at least \$2 in return, making Great Lakes restoration one of the best investments in the federal budget. More recent research from Grand Valley

State University suggests that the return on investment 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 to stop protecting and restoring the Great Lakes.

Now is not the time to scale back our nation's commitment to restore the Great Lakes environment and economy. Progress is being made. For the economy and the environment, please make sure that the fiscal year 2017 appropriations bills provide at least \$300 million for the GLRI; water infrastructure funding is maintained at \$1.45 billion for the Clean Water SRF and increased to at least \$1.0 billion for the Drinking Water SRF; \$2.6 million to help complete the Brandon Road study plus more to stop Asian carp from getting to Lake Michigan; and resources for the RCPP and all Farm Bill conservation programs.

If you have questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact our coalition's policy director, Chad Lord, at 202-454-3385 or clord@npca.org.

Sincerely,

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The Honorable Mike Simpson
The Honorable Marcy Kaptur
The Honorable Ken Calvert
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