



## Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition

March 22, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
S-128 Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
S-146A Capitol  
Washington, DC 2051

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Mikulski:

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](mailto:clord@npca.org).

Sincerely,

Molly M. Flanagan  
Vice President, Policy  
Alliance for the Great Lakes

Brian Smith  
Associate Executive Director  
Citizens Campaign for the Environment

Katie Rousseau  
Director, Clean Water Supply, Great Lakes  
American Rivers

Deanna White  
State Director  
Clean Water Action Minnesota

Erin Crotty  
Executive Director  
Audubon New York

Michael Kelly  
Director  
The Conservation Fund

Loren Smith  
Executive Director  
Buffalo Audubon Society

Michael Griffin  
Executive Director  
County Executives of America

Jill Jedlicka  
Executive Director & Riverkeeper  
Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper

William Schleizer  
CEO  
Delta Institute

Stuart D. Strahl  
President and CEO  
Chicago Zoological Society

David Brakhage  
Director of Operations  
Great Lakes/Atlantic Region  
Ducks Unlimited

Howard A. Learner  
Executive Director  
Environmental Law & Policy Center

Rev. Brian J. Sauder  
Executive Director  
Faith in Place  
The Illinois Affiliate of Interfaith Power &  
Lights

Jill M. Ryan  
Executive Director  
Freshwater Future

Matt Meersman  
President  
Friends of the St. Joe River Association

Mike Carlson  
Executive Director  
Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for  
Land Trusts

June Summers  
President  
Genesee Valley Audubon Society

Indra Frank  
Environmental Health & Water Policy Director  
Hoosier Environmental Council

Laura Rubin  
Executive Director  
Huron River Watershed Council

Darwin Adams  
Chairman  
Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited

Erin Baird  
Executive Director  
Indiana Wildlife Federation

Duane De Vries  
President, Dwight Lydell Chapter  
Izaak Walton League of America

Jill Crafton  
Chair, Great Lakes Committee  
Izaak Walton League of America

Ivan Jack Jr  
President, Headwaters Chapter  
Izaak Walton League of America

Tim Russell  
Division President, Indiana Division  
Izaak Walton League of America

Robert Stegmier,  
Michigan National Director  
Izaak Walton League of America

Barry Drazkowski  
President, Minnesota Division  
Izaak Walton League of America

Les Monostory  
President, New York State Division  
Izaak Walton League of America

Dayle Harrison  
President  
Kalamazoo River Protection Association

Alan J Weener  
President  
Kalamazoo River Sturgeon for Tomorrow

Paul Pacholski  
President  
Lake Erie Charter Boat Association

Sandy Bihn  
Executive Director  
Lake Erie Waterkeeper Inc.

Bryan David  
Government Relations Specialist  
Land Trust Alliance

James Clift  
Policy Director  
Michigan Environmental Council

Bryan Burroughs  
Executive Director  
Michigan Trout Unlimited

Daniel Eichinger  
Executive Director  
Michigan United Conservation Clubs

John J. Ropp  
President/CEO  
Michigan Wildlife Conservancy

Kimberlee Wright  
Executive Director  
Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc.

Cheryl Nenn  
Riverkeeper  
Milwaukee Riverkeeper

Gary Botzek  
Executive Director  
Minnesota Conservation Federation

Steve Morse  
Executive Director  
Minnesota Environmental Partnership

John P. Lenczewski  
Executive Director  
Minnesota Trout Unlimited

Lynn McClure  
Senior Midwest Director  
National Parks Conservation Association

Mike Shriberg  
Regional Executive Director, Great Lakes  
National Wildlife Federation

Melinda Hughes  
President  
Nature Abounds

Marc Hudon  
Chair, Water Commission  
Nature Québec

Dennis West  
President  
Northern Initiatives

Dan Plath  
President  
Northwest Indiana Paddling Association

Richard Hedgepeth  
President  
Northwest Indiana Steelheaders

Matt Misicka  
President  
Ohio Conservation Federation

Kristy Meyer  
Managing Director, Natural Resources  
Ohio Environmental Council

Ray Stewart  
President  
Ohio Wetlands Association

Carol Hays  
Executive Director  
Prairie Rivers Network

Irene Senn  
Coordinator  
Religious Coalition for the Great Lakes

Denny Caneff  
Executive Director  
River Alliance of Wisconsin

Nicole Silk  
President  
River Network

Nicole Barker  
Executive Director  
Save the Dunes

Lee Willbanks  
Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper  
Executive Director  
Save The River

Robin Schachat  
President  
The Shaker Lakes Garden Club

Jennifer McKay,  
Policy Specialist  
Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council

Carol A. Stepien  
Distinguished University Professor of Ecology  
Director, Lake Erie Center  
University of Toledo

Steve Moyer  
Vice President for Government Affairs  
Trout Unlimited

Dendra J. Best  
Executive Director  
Wastewater Education 501(c)3

Christine Crissman  
Executive Director  
The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay

Rich Cochran  
President & CEO  
Western Reserve Land Conservancy

Linn Beck  
State Council Chair  
Wisconsin Trout Unlimited

George Meyer  
Executive Director  
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

Cc: The Honorable Jerry Moran  
The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
The Honorable Tom Udall