

## Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition 2019-2021 Strategic Plan

The Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition (HOW Coalition) consists of more than 150 environmental, conservation, outdoor recreation organizations, community groups, and other nongovernmental entities representing millions of people, whose common goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes. Our Coalition's broad diversity of organizations is our strength. Working together this array of organizations have united for conservation and built a broad, bipartisan coalition that has helped propel Great Lakes restoration to the forefront of national conservation policy priorities.

Every three years, the HOW Coalition creates a strategic plan to identify a new vision and priority goals, as well as specific strategies to realize them. The 2019-2021 strategic plan was developed through an inclusive planning process that integrates the perspectives of multiple stakeholders and considers the evolving context of HOW's mission and work.

### CURRENT CONTEXT

#### *Sample of Successes of the 2016-2018 Strategic Plan*

- *Congress approved a five year, \$300 million authorization of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI).*
- *GLRI received \$300 million per year in appropriations on the strength of broad bipartisan support to reject the Trump Administration's proposal to cut all of nearly all funding*
- *The Coalition broadened and intensified its work advocating for wastewater, drinking water, and storm water improvements, helping to secure increased funding as part of the FY2018 omnibus spending package.*
- *Developed over 150 restoration success stories, conducted communications trainings, expanded presence on social media and created targeted materials for each Great Lakes Day and fly-ins.*
- *Organized a record number of coalition groups (151) and partners to sign onto a letter asking Congress to fund key Great Lakes priorities, including not only GLRI and infrastructure but also support for the base budgets of federal agencies, Asian carp prevention and Regional Conservation Partnership Program.*
- *The HOW Coalition Governance Board added five new organizations, including community water advocacy groups, a coldwater conservation organization and groups working on the ground in frontline communities.*
- *The Coalition created and is strategically utilizing an Equity Advisory and Action Committee.*
- *The Coalition has added more than thirty new, diverse member organizations.*
- *Convened the Great Lakes advocacy community at three highly successful conferences, 3 Great Lakes days in Washington, D.C. and numerous fly-ins and small convenings.*

Given this incredible momentum, a key question that has informed the 2019-2021 strategic plan is: How can the Coalition maintain the steadfast mission focus that has enabled its success, while also leveraging its strengths to drive further impact?

#### *Side Bar: Equity Statement*

In 2017, the HOW Coalition adopted the following statement on equity, which is now playing a key role in guiding our work:

“The Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition wants to play our part in ensuring that federal Great Lakes restoration investments benefit all of the people and communities in the region—

particularly those who have borne the brunt of racial, environmental and economic injustice. Equity means we will strive to intentionally include those who have been historically excluded—specifically people of color and people from impoverished backgrounds—and work to break down barriers to their inclusion within the Great Lakes community. We believe that we have a responsibility as a successful, powerful, respected Coalition to ensure that we invite all voices to the table and respect lived expertise. Engaging in equity work means that we strive to restore and protect the Great Lakes so that all of the region’s people can have access to affordable, clean, safe drinking water; to eat fish that are safe and not toxic; and to live healthy lives that are not undermined by toxic pollutants and legacy contaminants. Further, we will work to ensure that public officials keep the doors to democracy open so that the region’s many communities, especially historically ostracized voices, have the opportunity to participate in decisions that impact their communities.”

### ***Outside Influences and Changes Since the 2016-2018 Strategic Plan***

Key changes — both external and internal — have transpired over the last few years and have the potential to impact (and in some cases, already have) the work of the Coalition.

- *Federal Change.* A turnover of federal government administrations in 2017 continues to present emerging challenges, including new directions for federal agencies, increased focus on deregulation, limited ability for public input into administrative processes and a hyper-partisan political atmosphere.
- *Issue Urgency.* Recent and ongoing catastrophes related to drinking water, as seen in Flint, MI as well as Toledo, OH and in the unfolding PFOS crisis, have elevated the urgency for the Coalition to commit to a proactive role in advocating for funding streams that support water infrastructure efforts.
- *Equity Imperative.* The Coalition has made a commitment to ensuring that federal Great Lakes restoration investments benefit all of the people and communities in the region— As part of this mission, the Coalition is actively engaging voices that have historically been absent from policy discussions around the Great Lakes.

### ***Catalytic Moments on the Horizon***

In addition to considering the forces of change that have been playing out, the Coalition has forecasted the following catalytic moments on the 2019-2021 horizon for which to prepare and plan.

#### ***Side Bar: Catalytic Moment Definition***

Catalytic moments have been defined as those events or trends that are:

- *Transformative.* Influence or shift HOW’s approach.
- *Unavoidable.* Command attention and reflection.
- *Urgent.* Instill a sense of urgency.
- *Direct.* Impact HOW directly.

The next three years promise many catalytic moments that may impact the Coalition’s work against this backdrop of increasing partisan discourse. This strategic plan will focus specifically on preparing for the following catalytic moments:

*2020 Elections.* The elections present the potential for more shifts at the state and federal levels and offer the opportunity to advance a Great Lakes Agenda during a presidential campaign year that will focus on several Great Lake states.

*GLRI Plan Update.* Action Plan III will outline priorities and goals for the GLRI for 2020-2024.

*Aging Water Infrastructure.* Aging and insufficient infrastructure poses an increasing threat to Great Lakes water quality, access, and affordability, from stormwater and wastewater to drinking water systems. We expect more crises to emerge from around the region.

## **THEMES FROM STAKEHOLDER INPUT**

The 2019-2021 strategic plan was developed through an inclusive planning process that included the following input gathering efforts.

1. *Coalition Member Survey:* The 2019-2021 Strategic Planning Input Survey was shared with individuals on the Healing Our Waters contact list.
2. *Governance Board Retreat and Engagement:* On January 25-26, 2018, the HOW Governance Board members convened in Chicago for a strategic planning workshop to discuss successes and challenges since the last Strategic Plan, key threats to the Great Lakes, catalytic moments on the horizon, and definitions of success in 3 and 10 years. Since the retreat, the Governance Board has weighed in on the strategic plan at key moments.
3. *Equity Advisory & Action Committee:* Through the Member Survey, discussions during the Committee's bi-monthly meeting, and online draft reviews, the perspectives of the Equity Advisory & Action Committee have informed this Strategic Plan.
4. *Funder Interviews.* Key Coalition funders were interviewed to better understand their perspective on the success, strengths, and vision of the Coalition.

From these input gathering efforts, a list of important themes emerged, including but not limited to:

1. *Focus:* Build on success for greater impact on Great Lakes restoration, while maintaining a clear focus.
2. *Diversity & Equity:* Strategically incorporate new voices and seek equitable outcomes.
3. *Leverage:* Better build and capitalize on member organizations' capacity.
4. *Responsiveness:* Clearly define different levels of engagement on emerging issues and track progress.
5. *Define Policy Goals:* Clarify the Coalition's focus on funding and/or regulatory policy.

These themes were distilled into the list of priorities presented below through a series of discussions with an ad-hoc Strategic Planning Working Group, made up of a subset of Coalition staff and Governance Board members, and with final approval from the full Governance Board.

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

The Coalition's 2019-2021 strategic priorities reflect key areas of focus that are critical to advancing its mission and supporting operational efficacy. These priorities seek to align urgency, impact, and capacity in directing the Coalition's energy and resources over the next 3 years.

### ***Core To Mission Priorities (The "What")***

HOW has identified the following 4 priorities that are core to advancing its mission.

1. *Defend Federal Funding and Programs for Restoring the Great Lakes*  
Maintain strong federal funding and programs for restoring the Great Lakes through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Farm Bill, and Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Funds, among others.
2. *Serve a Critical Convener Function*

Increase leadership role as a key convener and facilitator on critical Great Lakes conservation issues, including the Great Lakes Restoration Conference and Great Lakes Day.

3. *Foster Diverse Coalition Inclusion & Participation*

In order to create the most effective and empowered coalition possible, HOW will strategically grow the composition of member organizations and processes over the next 3 years to ensure that its perspective, governance, and actions more closely reflect the diverse interests, stakeholders, and demographics of the Great Lakes region, with particular emphasis on including those that have been historically excluded. In the short-term, HOW will seek strategic growth in member organizations, work more closely with water advocacy groups in key Great Lakes urban areas, more fully engage the Equity Advisory & Action Committee, and work with additional lead member groups in our key states.

4. *Efficient, Effective & Equitable Spending*

Help to ensure the efficient, effective, and equitable expenditure of Great Lakes restoration funds.

### ***Operational Priorities (The “How”)***

HOW has identified the following 4 operational priorities to focus on in the next 3 years to support advancement of its mission.

1. *Create Intentional Levels of Engagement*

In order to most effectively allocate its organizational resources, maintain an appropriate focus, and strive for greater issue inclusivity, HOW will define three different levels of engagement (support, participate, and lead), and accompanying levels of organization involvement for each (i.e. communication, staff time, etc.).

2. *Commit to People-Water Nexus Messaging*

Better project human-centered messaging while promoting ecological restoration. Recognize, speak to, and act on issues that center on intersecting human and ecological systems, like safety and health of drinking water quality.

3. *Grow the Strength and Meaning of the “Great Lakes Champion” Title*

Expand definition of “Great Lakes Champion” to include defending both the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative as well as other federal funding sources and programs that support Great Lakes health.

4. *Tracking Impact*

In order to more clearly demonstrate the tangible, equitable outcomes and effectiveness of its efforts, HOW will define and track a set of meaningful indicators, whether they be related to political, organizational, or equitable goals.

## **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

### ***Resources and Revenue***

The HOW Coalition is extremely grateful for the long term, significant funding of key foundations including the Wege Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Erb Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Brookby Foundation. Many additional organizations, foundations, businesses and individuals support annual events like Great Lakes Day and the restoration conference. But additional needs identified over the next three years to achieve the important goals

of the coalition will necessitate the need to actively seek other revenue sources to build the capacity for the activity contemplated in this plan.

***Dashboard Description***

To accompany this strategic plan narrative a living dashboard was created as an internal tool for the Coalition's staff and Governance Board, to guide implementation, create accountability, and track progress. The dashboard — containing the following categories of information — will be updated and revisited periodically to hold an accurate account of action and aid in reporting progress to internal and external stakeholders, such as leadership committees, like the Equity Advisory & Action Committee, and funders.

Priority	Goal	Strategies	Indicator	Lead	Support	Reporting
Where will we focus resources in the next 3 years?	What is our objective?	What are the implementation steps?	How will we track progress?	Who is accountable?	Who will provide support?	How will this be tracked and reported out?

***Annual Campaign Plans***

Each year, the Coalition produces a campaign plan to detail yearly work plans. Informed by the priorities of the 2019-2021 strategic plan, annual campaign plans for the next three years will spell out specific tactics and objectives around each of the goals and strategies, and will be updated on the dashboard.