



April 15, 2019

The Honorable José Serrano
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
H-310 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Serrano and Ranking Member Aderholt:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to ask that you assure the Fiscal Year 2020 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill provides funding for Great Lakes restoration priorities. We are grateful for the much-needed support the region has received. We are seeing on-the-ground results because of the investments in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. However, the Great Lakes still face many urgent problems, which is why we are concerned with the President's proposed budget. The problems we face will only get worse and the price we pay will be much higher if the federal partnership with the region is scaled back.

First, we ask the subcommittee to support the efforts of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). NOAA is one of the critical contributing partners to the GLRI, an agency that is supplemented and enhanced by the GLRI and provides critical research capacity for the Great Lakes Region. The initiative is improving the lives of millions of people and has seen efforts undertaken or completed on 4,706 restoration projects throughout the region. Projects that are benefiting communities by cleaning up waters that are the drinking source for millions of homes and thousands of industries. Results, include:

- Three Areas of Concern – Presque Isle, Pa.; Deer Lake, Mich.; and White Lake, Mich. – have been delisted since the GLRI began. The management actions necessary to delist 11 additional AOCs have also been completed. In the previous two decades before the GLRI, only one AOC had been cleaned up.
- 73 beneficial use impairments (BUIs) were addressed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin under the GLRI, more than six times the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years. More BUIs have been removed under the GLRI than between 1987 and 2009.
- Combined with other funding, farmers implemented conservation action on more than 750,000 acres of rural lands through 2017 to reduce erosion and farm runoff that feeds toxic algal

outbreaks. GLRI's supplemental funding helped double farmland under conservation around Western Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay, and Green Bay, reducing projected phosphorus runoff by nearly 770,000 pounds.

- Over 5,000 river miles have been cleared of dams and barriers resulting in fish swimming into stretches of river where they have been absent for decades.

Second, we ask you to support Great Lakes programs that are the foundation upon which the success of the GLRI is built. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as an important federal partner to Great Lakes restoration, provides research capacity and leads monitoring efforts across the region through a number of critical regional and national programs. A partnership without which our restoration efforts would fall short of our goals leading us to urge Congress to reject the Administration's unacceptable cuts.

These essential programs include the Great Lakes Environmental Research Lab, operated by NOAA. The lab conducts innovative research on the dynamic environments and ecosystems of the region's water system that is critical in informing the restoration and management of safe and sustainable ecosystems, ecosystem services, and communities. Its investigations have included analyses of the food web changes since the Zebra and Quagga mussel invasion, the impacts of climate change, the development of coastal forecast systems, and harmful algal bloom forecasting. We urge the subcommittee to continue supporting this work by designating \$10 million in funding for the continued operation of the lab. We also support \$3 million for the Great Lakes Observing System. As part of a vast network, the system is a core component of the information infrastructure critical to safe navigation across the Lakes and responding to toxic spills, storms, and other coastal hazards.

Third, the growing threat of harmful algal blooms is of great concern to the region. New blooms are being fueled by excessive amounts of phosphorus washing into the lakes from urban and agricultural runoff. Moreover, stronger storms driven by climate change and the ecosystem impact of invasive mussels contribute to the problem. These harmful algal blooms close beaches, kill fish, impact local drinking water supplies (like Toledo, Ohio, in 2014), and when water supplies are contaminated, the most vulnerable members of the community are the first to be impacted. The Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act program empowers NOAA to work collaboratively with research partners to engage with this threat in the Great Lakes. Research seeks to use an integrated approach to understand the ecosystem dynamics and environmental drivers of these blooms to improve prediction and mitigation strategies. Harmful algal blooms are spreading farther and faster and beginning earlier than ever before and we must act to protect communities from this growing threat. We urge Congress to fund NOAA's activities by providing \$25 million for the program and its Competitive External Research grants.

We also urge Congress to continue supporting the other programs and partnerships that collaboratively support and enhance regional restoration efforts. The Sea Grant College program provides for a federal partnership with academic and research institutions to educate and inform the public on maintaining resilient communities and economies, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, healthy coastal ecosystems, and promoting environmental literacy and workforce development. Its elimination, as the administration requests, only harms the health and resilience of our coastal communities and makes it extremely difficult to make progress on critical clean-up efforts in places like western Lake Erie where Ohio Sea Grant serves as a key part of the work to reduce HABs. We support \$93.5 million for the program in the new fiscal year. Furthermore, we urge Congress to appropriate \$76 million for the Coastal Zone Management Grants. These grants are critical in supporting the participation of underfunded state agencies in the voluntary Coastal Zone Management Program that brings about coordination between state and federal regulators for the restoration and responsible development of our coastal communities

and resources. We also support \$10 million for the Marine Debris Program that coordinates regional efforts for the prevention, research, monitoring, emergency response, and removal of debris, an effort that benefits coastal habitats, wildlife, and protects the public who use our region's waterways.

Investments in Great Lakes restoration create jobs and lead to long-term economic benefits for the Great Lakes states and the country. A report last fall from economists at the University of Michigan, Central Michigan University, and Duke University demonstrated that the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative's (GLRI) ecological investments are resulting in significant economic benefits. The study showed that for every \$1 the GLRI invested through 2016 to clean up toxic hot spots in Areas of Concern (AOC), control invasive species, restore wildlife habitat, protect wetlands, and reduce harmful algae the investment will produce more than \$3 in additional economic activity regionwide through 2036 (more in some cities-see chart). This new research demonstrated that the GLRI is creating new real estate and commercial development--particularly in waterfront areas. This development has resulted in a resurgence in water-based, outdoor recreation and increasing tourism across the region, increasing housing options and home values, and an increasing number of young people staying in or relocating to Great Lakes communities.

However, there is still much work that needs to be done. Aging infrastructure, 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 making them 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 and we are seeing results. For the economy and the environment, please make sure that the fiscal year 2020 appropriations bills provide at least \$300 million for the GLRI and fund NOAA's monitoring, research, and grant 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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