



A Great Lakes Platform for 2020

Since 2005, the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition of over 160 non-governmental partners and allies has successfully fought for federal funds and policies to restore and protect the Great Lakes for all. The results are impressive. The region is cleaning up toxic pollution that threatens people and wildlife, reducing polluted runoff that causes harmful algal blooms, stopping invasive species that harm wildlife and outdoor recreation, reversing habitat destruction that harms the environment and hurts the economy, and fixing the region's aging water infrastructure. Federal investments are producing results in communities across Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

Protecting and restoring the Great Lakes is critical for the health and quality of life of the region and nation. It drives economic development, resulting in significant benefits and jobs. Research shows that Great Lakes restoration investments are leading a resurgence in water-based outdoor recreation, increasing tourism across the region, creating new real estate and commercial development, increasing housing options and home values, and increasing the number of young people staying in or relocating to Great Lakes communities.

Even with these results, recent bi-national reports show that more work must be done to address the serious threats that remain. Great Lakes rivers and harbors are still contaminated with toxic sediment, stunting the development and threatening the health of too many communities. Harmful runoff from farm fields continues to pollute our waters, causing toxic algae that threatens water systems, public health, and economic vitality. Habitat loss and aquatic invasive species continue to damage our region's outdoor way of life. And communities across the region continue to grapple with crumbling, antiquated drinking water and wastewater infrastructure that threatens public health – a problem that will cost a staggering \$179 billion in needed improvements, upgrades, and repairs in the eight-state region over the next 20 years. Many of these threats also disproportionately impact people that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice, underscoring an urgency to address these issues for everyone in the region. Moreover, the region's changing climate exacerbates all these challenges and more.

To maintain progress there needs to be a long-term commitment to the Great Lakes that provides opportunity for all to benefit from and enjoy the results of restoration and protection, ensuring equitable access to drinking water for more than 30 million Americans, creating the next generation of environmental stewards, and establishing water-resilient communities in the face of climate change. Coalition member organizations work individually and together on one or all the five issues below. We urge our region's leaders to demonstrate their support for the Great Lakes and the people, businesses, and wildlife that depend on them:

- Ramp up Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding to \$475 million to accelerate the work of cleaning up toxic contamination, reducing polluted runoff, stopping invasive species, restoring wetlands and other habitats, and responding to emerging threats.
- Create and fund an equitable plan that addresses our region's \$179 billion backlog in drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure so all people have access to safe and affordable water services.
- Stop and control the introduction and spread of invasive species in the region by blocking Asian carp at Brandon Road Lock & Dam and implementing strong ballast water protection measures.
- Strengthen, develop, and enforce federal standards to deal with well-known public health threats and to respond to emerging concerns threatening the region's water.
- Reduce harmful algal blooms in waterways across the Great Lakes by linking conservation funding and policy to targeted water quality outcomes.

Ramp up Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding to \$475 million to boost our work of cleaning up toxic contamination, reducing polluted runoff, stopping invasive species, restoring wetlands and other habitats, and responding to emerging threats. Over the last decade, we've seen progress protecting and restoring the Great Lakes thanks to the GLRI. Nearly two-fifths of the region's most toxic hotspots have been cleaned up, sparking redevelopment and business opportunities on waterfronts. Conservation practices on area farms have doubled, reducing harmful nutrient runoff. Habitat and wildlife restoration and connectivity continue to improve with over 5,250 miles of rivers cleared of dams and other barriers. However, the gap between what we are doing and what we need to do continues to grow. If every person is to have a healthy community to live in, with safe fish to eat and equitable access to recreate on clean beaches, shorelines, and restored landscapes, we must increase our efforts and focus resources in these areas today. Moving forward, our work will only get harder as the climate changes and we discover new threats. **Candidates who support the Great Lakes should explain how they will increase funding for the GLRI to \$475 million without supplanting other critical federal funding.**

Create and fund an equitable plan that addresses our region's \$179 billion backlog in drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure so all people have access to safe, affordable drinking water. The Great Lakes region holds 90 percent of North America's surface fresh water, yet it is facing a water infrastructure crisis. Communities across the Great Lakes region are grappling with crumbling and unsafe drinking water and wastewater infrastructure – a staggering \$179 billion over the next 20 years is needed in improvements, upgrades, and repairs. The federal government's contribution to this work has declined from 63 percent of water infrastructure spending in 1977 to 9 percent today. These costs are often being passed on to those who can least afford it, disproportionately impacting communities that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice, with water utility bills doubling or tripling over the last decade in many cities. These challenges are only expected to get worse as a changing climate leads to more rainstorms that overwhelm sewer systems and contaminate drinking water sources, pushing our current infrastructure past its limits. Nature-based solutions are cost-effective and provide significant community, wildlife, and climate resiliency benefits. **Candidates who support the Great Lakes should explain how they will triple federal investments to fix our region's wastewater, drinking water, and stormwater infrastructure. Candidates must explain how to make sure water is affordable to all, nature-based solutions are a priority, and people have the support they need to keep their water from being shut off.**

Stop and control the introduction and spread of invasive species in the region by blocking Asian carp at Brandon Road and implementing strong ballast water rules. Aquatic and terrestrial invasive species are altering the basic functions of the Great Lakes and its connected waterways, disrupting fisheries, wildlife, and clean water supply. In particular, the Great Lakes support a \$7 billion fishing industry, which is directly threatened by approaching non-native Asian carp. In places in the Illinois River, where the carp have taken over, these invasive fish make up 90 percent of the aquatic life present. The 2019 Vessel Incidental Discharge Act (VIDA) provides the means to monitor the movement of invasive species and develop the policy and technology to prevent new infestations. Moreover, new terrestrial and aquatic species threaten the region as the climate warms. **Candidates who support the Great Lakes should explain how they will build new prevention measures at Brandon Road Lock and Dam and how to block the transfer of Asian Carp at other places across the basin. Candidates should explain how they will ensure the same strong ballast water rules for every vessel in the Great Lakes.**

Strengthen, develop, and enforce federal standards to deal with well-known public health threats and to respond to emerging concerns threatening the region's water. Clean water is a basic need, but many cities and towns that can least afford it are still living with unsafe drinking water due to well-known contaminants like lead, emerging contaminants like PFAS, and changes to federal clean water protections. The accumulation of toxins like mercury in the food chain also threaten Great Lakes communities, especially indigenous populations. We cannot allow pollution into small waterways without it affecting the rest of the water and fisheries on which we all depend. Federal laws can help communities protect drinking water from existing and emerging contaminants if the Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, other laws and bi-national agreements are implemented, enforced, and strengthened. **Candidates who support the Great Lakes should explain how they will enforce clean water and drinking water laws and develop tougher standards to help community's clean-up and prevent public health problems from legacy pollutants, existing contamination, and emerging threats in the region's waterways.**

Reduce harmful algal blooms in waterways across the Great Lakes by linking conservation funding and policy to targeted water quality outcomes. Harmful algal blooms (HABs) and nuisance algae threaten our drinking water, economy, outdoor recreation, and fish and wildlife. In 2014, a toxic algal outbreak blanketed western Lake Erie, prompting Toledo city officials to issue a "do not drink" advisory impacting more than 400,000 people. Slow progress has been made towards the 40 percent Lake Erie phosphorus reduction target for 2025, and both observed and projected climate change impacts, such as increases in heavy rainfall and rising temperatures, are increasing the prevalence and threats posed by HABs across the region. **Candidates who support the Great Lakes should explain how they will reduce harmful algal blooms across the region (including the 40 percent Lake Erie reduction goal) by linking the region's Farm Bill conservation funding and Clean Water Act programs to numeric, water-quality based outcomes.**