December 3, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, I write to urge the House of Representatives to bring to the floor for consideration H.R. 4031, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2019, before the end of the year. The bill, which is led by Reps. David Joyce and Marcy Kaptur, has broad bipartisan support with 50 cosponsors almost evenly divided and was unanimously supported in the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee in September. The Great Lakes define our region’s way of life, provide drinking water for over 30 million Americans, and is at the heart of a binational economy that is the 3rd largest in the world. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has been restoring these waters and protecting the health and well-being of those that rely on them.

H.R. 4031 reauthorizes the successful Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and helps meet the on-the-ground needs of communities by increasing the annual authorization over five years to $475 million. Over the past decade the GLRI has improved lives across Great Lakes communities after decades of environmental damage threatened public health, the regional economy, and drinking water. The GLRI has allowed the 8-state region to undertake one of the world’s largest freshwater ecosystem restoration projects. Since its inception, the initiative has resulted in economic returns of more than 3 to 1 across the region and made tremendous progress. For example, the GLRI has:

- Tripled the delisting of areas with extreme degradation (Areas of Concern or AOCs)
- Increased the remediation of environmental and public health impairments nearly seven-fold
- Doubled farmland acres under conservation, reducing nutrient and sediment runoff
- Invested in critical research and forecasting of toxic algal blooms
- Controlled and stopped the advance of invasive species
- Restored habitat connectivity to over 5,250 river miles

Even with these results, there is still much work to be done. Two-thirds of beneficial use impairments remain untreated across 19 AOCs, placing the health of communities at risk. Drinking water and coastal economies remain under threat from toxic algal blooms that have shut down entire water systems, as was seen in Toledo, Ohio in 2014. Invasive species, like Asian Carp, are knocking at the door of the lakes and threaten its $7 billion fishery. Moreover,
emerging contaminants and a changing climate continue to exacerbate the challenges we face, many of which disproportionately impact people that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice. This underscores the urgency for the GLRI to address these growing threats by working to ensure restoration investments lead to equitable outcomes for everyone in the region.

The GLRI has been an environmental and economic success, but much work remains. The region stands ready to continue this important federal partnership and ensure that all benefit from and enjoy these investments in restoration and protection.

Since 2004, the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition has been harnessing the collective power of more than 160 non-governmental organizations representing millions of people, whose common goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes. We are pleased to offer our support for this much-needed bill and urge House leadership to bring the bill to the floor for a vote.

Please do not hesitate to contact Chad Lord, our coalition’s policy director, if you have any questions. He can be reached at (202) 454-3385 or clord@npca.org.

Sincerely,

Laura Rubin
Director

Cc: The Honorable Steny Hoyer
    The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
    The Honorable David Joyce
    The Honorable Marcy Kaptur