



December 20, 2019

The Honorable R.D. James
Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310

The Honorable Russell Vought
Acting Director
The Office of Management Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Assistant Secretary James and Acting Director Vought:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to ask that you ensure the FY2020 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) work plan provides funding for Great Lakes restoration priorities. The Army Corps of Engineers is a critical partner in the region: enhancing efforts through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to restore and protect the environment and waters essential to our communities and fighting on the frontlines of the region's defense against invasive Asian Carp. We are grateful for the much-needed support the region has received with investments leading to on-the-ground results across Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

However, the Great Lakes still face many urgent problems and we urge the Corps include projects of critical importance to the Great Lakes in the FY2020 Work Plan. 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 delayed or scaled back. These include:

Brandon Road Lock & Dam (Preconstruction Engineering and Design)

The threat of aquatic invasive species, like Asian carp, is real and persistent in our region. The establishment of Asian carp in the Great Lakes would devastate a \$7 billion fisheries industry and would undermine the outdoor recreation economy on which many of our communities depend. The Corps of Engineers is at the forefront of these efforts engaging federal and local partners on critical construction projects in defense of the spread of these invasive species.

Earlier this year the Corps finalized its Chief's Report for the Brandon Road Lock and Dam, a critical chokepoint for preventing the inter-basin transfer and the establishment of Asian carp and other invasive fish in the Great Lakes. The Chief's Report incorporates a layered

approach to addressing this threat through structural and nonstructural measures including an engineered channel, air bubble curtain, acoustic fish deterrent, and electric barrier as well as integrated pest management and nonstructural monitoring, research, and development. These measures are essential but take time to properly engineer and build.

It is critical that there be no delay in moving forward with the finalized Chief's report. We ask the Army Corps to move to pre-construction engineering and design for the Brandon Road lock and dam and include the necessary \$3.8 million federal contribution in the FY2020 work plan.

Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program

Habitat restoration and the reestablishment of natural and free-flowing waterways is essential to restoring the Great Lakes ecosystem and the key fisheries of the region. The critical ecosystem services provided by wetlands and free flowing waterways have been lost over decades of water quality degradation and development. This has led to a loss in ecological and coastal resiliency, in addition to allowing the incursion of invasive species replacing iconic and keystone native fish.

The Corps through the Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program (GLFER) is a key partner in addressing this challenge. GLFER engages in the planning, design, and construction of projects that restore ecosystems across the Great Lakes watershed. Projects executed under this program (in collaboration with cost-sharing non-federal partners) include the restoration of wetlands and aquatic habitat on public lands, dam removal to re-establish free flowing rivers, improving fish passages, spawning and nursery habitat, and restoration of coastal habitat.

Since its start in 2006, 24 GLFER projects have been completed or are currently under construction. FY2018 saw three projects begin construction and two projects were scheduled to be awarded in FY19. Nearly 30 additional projects are currently in the planning or design phase and will need further support from the Corps to bring to fruition. We urge the Corps support the GLFER program by including \$10 million in its FY2020 Work Plan for the construction of shovel-ready projects and the continued planning and design of other restoration projects.

Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study

The Great Lakes region is seeing significant and far-reaching impacts due to the changing climate. Lake levels are becoming more variable and extreme weather events are becoming more common, flooding communities and degrading water quality as deteriorating infrastructure is unable to protect the Lakes from polluted runoff. 2019 has seen record high lake levels, ranging from 14 in. to nearly 3 ft. above long-term averages. In June coastal communities saw the waters in Lakes Erie, Ontario, and Superior set records for monthly average levels, while Lakes Michigan and Huron rose to within 1 in. of their record peak. These are record levels that have come only five years after the lakes experienced historic lows, a pattern that in the long-term will only increase as rising temperatures will see lake levels jump from extreme highs to extreme lows with increasing regularity.

The Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study (GLCRS) is a key step in understanding the effects of climate change and pathways to greater coastal resiliency. Our coastal communities are already seeing the dramatic impacts with increasing shore erosion, flooding of critical infrastructure, and more frequent and severe damage to coastal communities and critical habitat becoming a perpetual challenge. As a regional collaborative, the GLCRS will investigate opportunities to improve resilience within both the built and natural coastal environments and aims to identify vulnerable areas and recommend measures to increase resilience. This partnership is an important step in providing essential information to our communities to ensure their long-term resilience and the sustainability of our local and federal investments.

Despite the program's formal authorization under the *America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018* (Sec. 1219 of P.L. 115-270), the Corps failed to include funding for the Study in the FY2019 Work Plan. We urge the Corps to include the study in its FY2020 Work Plan and provide \$1.2 million for its undertaking.

The USACE is an essential partner in Great Lake restoration. We urge the Corps to continue its work by providing the resources necessary for the Brandon Road Lock & Dam, Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration program, and the Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study in the FY2020 Work Plan. These three projects are important steps in the long-term protection and resiliency of the on-the-ground work and investments being made today to protect our waters, communities, and economy.

We thank you for your consideration and if you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact our coalition's policy director, Chad Lord, at 202-454-3385 or clord@npca.org.

Sincerely,

Advocates for a Clean Lake Erie

Ducks Unlimited

Alliance for the Great Lakes

Environment Michigan

American Sportfishing Association

Environmental Law & Policy Center

Audubon New York

For Love of Water (FLOW)

Black Autonomy Network Community Organization

Freshwater Future

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper

Friends of the Chicago River

Citizens Campaign for the Environment

Headwaters Chapter Izaak Walton League of America

Clean Water Action Minnesota

Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC

Clean Wisconsin

Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited

Illinois Environmental Council
Indiana Sportsmen's Roundtable
Indiana Wildlife Federation
Indiana's North Coast Charter Association
Izaak Walton Des Plaines Illinois chapter
Izaak Walton League of America Great Lakes Committee
Izaak Walton League of America Illinois Division
Izaak Walton League of America - Ohio Division
Lake Erie Charter Boat Association
Lake Erie Waterkeeper
Lakeshore Natural Resource Partnership
Michigan United Conservation Clubs
Michigan Wildlife Conservancy
Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Milwaukee Water Commons
Minnesota Division - Izaak Walton League of America
National Audubon Society
National Wildlife Federation
Ohio Environmental Council
Onondaga Audubon
Religious Coalition for the Great Lakes
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Save the Dunes
Save the River – St. Lawrence Riverkeeper
Shedd Aquarium
Sierra Club Ohio Chapter
Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester Global Environment Committee
Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council
Trout Unlimited
West Michigan Environmental Action Council
Western Reserve Land Conservancy
Wisconsin Environment
Wisconsin Metro Audubon Society
Wisconsin Wetlands Association
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation