

# WATER INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION



**WE MUST UPGRADE OUR OUTDATED DRINKING WATER AND SEWAGE TREATMENT INFRASTRUCTURE.**

Clean water is a basic need, and we should do what it takes to ensure it is available to everyone in the region. Unfortunately many of our cities and towns are living with unsafe drinking water. Communities across the Great Lakes region continue to grapple with crumbling, antiquated drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. A staggering \$188 billion over the next 20 years is needed in improvements, upgrades, and repairs in the eight-state region of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York (Figure 1). Paying for water infrastructure projects is expensive and often falls on communities that cannot afford it, underscoring the importance of financial support from the federal government. Now is not the time to cut back on clean water investments. We need more—not less—protection for clean water.



The Healing Our Waters – Great Lakes Coalition asks the U.S. Congress to:

- **Provide at least \$5.7 billion for wastewater, drinking water, and stormwater infrastructure** in rural, urban, and suburban communities by supporting the reauthorization of the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) and funding the Clean Water SRF and Drinking Water SRF at no less than \$3.4 billion and \$2.3 billion respectively.
- **Ensure that infrastructure funding supports nature-based solutions** that prevent problems before they become more serious and that enhance climate resilience. Funding should include a set-aside for projects that incorporate nature-based infrastructure.
- **Ensure the affordability of clean water and the equitable investment in and engagement of communities** through more grants and flexible financing options, local hiring and training, and utility-sponsored programs and requirements that help families avoid water shut offs.
- **Ensure that infrastructure legislation does not undermine or weaken environmental protections.** Clean water protections go hand in hand with robust infrastructure investments to ensure every person has access to clean, safe and affordable water. Weakening environmental laws will only lead to more pollution—putting the burden on communities to pay more to clean it up.
- **Preserve and strengthen source water protections** that also help reduce runoff, support fish and wildlife, and provide recreational opportunities.

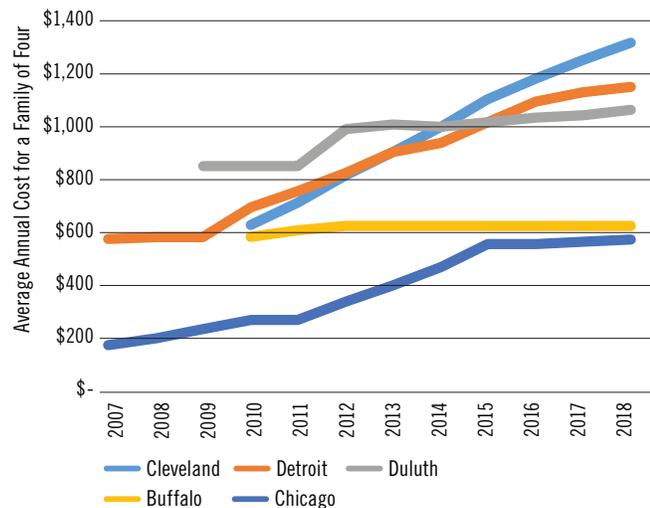
**Figure 1: Great Lakes Region Infrastructure Investment Needs**

	 <b>Wastewater Infrastructure Need over 20 Years<sup>1</sup></b>	 <b>Drinking Water Infrastructure Need over 20 Years<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Total Infrastructure Need over 20 Years</b>
<b>Illinois</b>	\$6.537 billion	\$20.910 billion	\$27.447 billion
<b>Indiana</b>	\$7.162 billion	\$7.520 billion	\$14.682 billion
<b>Michigan</b>	\$2.077 billion	\$13.046 billion	\$15.123 billion
<b>Minnesota</b>	\$2.389 billion	\$7.508 billion	\$9.897 billion
<b>New York</b>	\$31.439 billion	\$22.766 billion	\$54.205 billion
<b>Ohio</b>	\$14.587 billion	\$13.405 billion	\$27.992 billion
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	\$6.950 billion	\$16.772 billion	\$23.722 billion
<b>Wisconsin</b>	\$6.329 billion	\$8.569 billion	\$14.898 billion
<b>Total Regional Need</b>	<b>\$77.470 billion</b>	<b>\$110.496 billion</b>	<b>\$187.966 billion</b>

## CRUMBLING INFRASTRUCTURE CAUSES WATER RATES TO RISE

People in the Great Lakes region are footing the bill for these expensive, but necessary, water infrastructure upgrades. From 2010 to 2017, water costs increased 41 percent across the country.<sup>3</sup> While water rates rise for consumers, federal funding for water infrastructure has dropped significantly since 1977. In that year, investments from the federal government made up 63 percent of total spending on water infrastructure. By 2014, the federal government's contribution had dropped to 9 percent.<sup>4</sup> In some communities, water bills have tripled over the last 10 years (Figure 2), and when individuals cannot pay their water bills they face water shutoffs, which jeopardize their health and the health of their children.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 2: Great Lakes Water and Sewer Prices Annual Cost**



Average annual water and sewer costs experienced by a family of four in cities around the Great Lakes region over the last decade. Data compiled by and published in an American Public Media report: <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2019/02/07/great-lakes-water-shutoffs>

## THREATS TO DRINKING WATER PERSIST IN COMMUNITIES

Old, leaky pipes waste 6 billion gallons of clean drinking water every day at a time when many families are struggling to afford their bills.<sup>6</sup> Problems stemming from inadequate water infrastructure afflict rural and urban communities alike—from toxic lead contamination in communities such as Flint and Milwaukee, to polluted farm runoff, nitrate contamination, and faulty septic systems in rural communities.

## SEWAGE POLLUTES THE GREAT LAKES, HARMING OUR WAY OF LIFE

Sewage overflows during heavy rains are still a reality in

the Great Lakes region with tens of billions of gallons of raw or partially treated sewage entering the lakes each year. Sewage contamination closes beaches and threatens public health. Our quality of life is undermined when our Great Lakes are polluted.

## FEDERAL INVESTMENTS KEY TO HELPING COMMUNITIES PROTECT CLEAN WATER

Sewage overflows can be prevented. Crumbling pipes can be replaced. Outdated facilities can be updated. But each of these projects costs money—often more money than communities alone can afford. Federal programs like the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds can help communities offset the cost of these needed investments in wastewater and drinking water infrastructure. Both offer low-interest loans to communities to address these costly infrastructure challenges. However, funding levels have not kept pace with need, and Congress should take steps to make these investments a priority, as well as boosting federal investment in grants rather than loans to promote water affordability.

## NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS CAN SAVE COMMUNITIES MONEY

Not all investments need to go towards replacing old infrastructure. Nature-based solutions including constructing rain gardens, planting trees, and restoring wetlands can help absorb and filter rain water before it overwhelms outdated systems. This reduces the burden on traditional water infrastructure and saves communities money.

## CONGRESS NEEDS TO ACT

Investments in the region are paying off—but much more needs to be done. The U.S. Congress needs to do its fair share to help local communities meet their clean water goals. We have solutions. It's time to use them. Delay will only make the problems worse and more costly to solve.



## ENDNOTES

- 1 U.S. E.P.A. 2016. "Clean Watersheds Needs Survey 2012: Report to Congress." Pp. A-1 – A-2. [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-12/documents/cwns\\_2012\\_report\\_to\\_congress-508-opt.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-12/documents/cwns_2012_report_to_congress-508-opt.pdf)
- 2 U.S. E.P.A. 2018. "Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment: Sixth Report to Congress." P. 36. [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2018-10/documents/corrected\\_sixth\\_drinking\\_water\\_infrastructure\\_needs\\_survey\\_and\\_assessment.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2018-10/documents/corrected_sixth_drinking_water_infrastructure_needs_survey_and_assessment.pdf)
- 3 Mack, E.A., and S. Wrase. "A Burgeoning Crisis? A Nationwide Assessment of the Geography of Water Affordability in the United States." PLOS ONE. Jan 11, 2017.
- 4 U.S. Water Alliance. 2017. "An Equitable Water Future: A National Briefing Paper" P. 12.
- 5 American Public Media in collaboration with Great Lakes Today and NPR. "So Close, Yet So Costly: In cities on the Great Lakes, water pipes are crumbling and poor people are paying the price." <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2019/02/07/great-lakes-water-shutoffs>
- 6 American Society of Civil Engineers 2017 "Infrastructure Report Card" <https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Drinking-Water-Final.pdf>



Since 2004, the Healing Our Waters–Great Lakes Coalition has been harnessing the collective power of more than 160 groups representing millions of people, whose common goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes. Learn more at [healthylakes.org](http://healthylakes.org). Follow us on Twitter @[@healthylakes](https://twitter.com/healthylakes).

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