



March 2, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies
SD-142
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Diane Feinstein
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies
SD-188
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Feinstein:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to ask that you assure the Fiscal Year 2021 Energy and Water Development, 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 urge Congress continue its support for Great Lakes restoration and protection by funding and authorizing those agencies and efforts that protect our waters and those that rely on them. The Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) is one of those critical leaders in the region providing essential research, technical expertise, and construction capability to undertake major restoration efforts.

For example, the challenge of soil erosion and runoff from farms, forests, and urban areas is a continuing threat. With impacts on water quality, the increasing risk and prevalence of harmful algal blooms, and the decrease in depths of navigation channels, the Corps is critical to the economic and sustainable future of the region. Programs like the Great Lakes Tributary Model develop and provide free access to an array of computer models and web-based tools that help state and local agencies and non-governmental groups evaluate the impacts of soil conservation and non-point source pollution control. This is in addition to providing free training programs and web-based tools that can be used to evaluate soil erosion and sediment delivery anywhere in the Great Lakes watershed. These services are important to Great Lakes restoration efforts and we urge Congress to continue supporting this program at \$600,000 in the new fiscal year.

Other critical restoration and research programs include the Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study (GLCRS) and the Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program. The GLCRS is a regional

initiative in which the Corps in collaboration with NOAA, USGS, FEMA and the EPA investigate opportunities to improve resilience within both the built and natural coastal environments; aiming to identify vulnerable areas and recommend measures to increase resilience. The Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program 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. We urge Congress to fund these previously unfunded initiatives at \$1.2 million and \$15 million respectively.

Second, the threat of aquatic invasive species, like Asian carp, is real and persistent in our region. To keep Asian carp out of the Great Lakes we ask Congress to fully fund all actions taken as part of the FY2019 Asian Carp Action Plan, adjusted to reflect the Asian carp threat and agency need. The Corps 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. We ask the subcommittee to include language that requires the Army Corps of Engineers to move to pre-construction engineering and design for new structural measures at the Brandon Road lock and dam and provide the necessary \$5 million in funding. The establishment of Asian carp in the Great Lakes would devastate a \$7 billion fisheries industry and would undermine the outdoor recreation economy. This site is a logical choke point to block the spread of this invasive species, and it is critical that the Corps has the mandate to move forward with the Brandon Road Lock and Dam Plan without delay.

We also urge Congress to continue funding existing defensive lines. The Chicago Sanitary Ship Canal Barrier is a system of electric barriers that protects the only known continuous connection between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins from the risk of transfer of invasive species. Operated to deter the inter-basin establishment of Asian carp and other invasive fish, the barriers are one control technology in a broad interagency Asian carp prevention effort. Ensuring its efficacy and continued operation is critical, and we urge Congress to provide at least \$14.3 million for the Corps continued efforts.

Third, we ask the Committee to support the efforts of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). The Corps is a critical partner to this effort, providing essential capacity and expertise for the remediation of toxic hotspots and enhancing habitat restoration efforts. The initiative is improving the lives of millions of people and has seen efforts undertaken or completed over 5,300 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.
- 80 beneficial use impairments (BUIs) were addressed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin under the GLRI, more than seven times the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years.
- Combined with other funding, farmers have implemented nutrient management actions on nearly 2 million acres of rural lands through 2017 to reduce erosion and farm runoff that feeds toxic algal outbreaks. GLRI's supplemental funding is helping increase farmland under conservation around Western Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay, and Green Bay, reducing projected phosphorus runoff by over 1.1 million pounds.

- Over 5,250 river miles have been cleared of dams and barriers resulting in fish swimming into stretches of river where they have been absent for decades.

Investments in Great Lakes restoration create jobs and lead to long-term economic benefits for the Great Lakes states and the country. It is estimated 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. The GLRI is revitalizing our waterfronts and leading a resurgence in water-based outdoor recreation, increasing tourism across the region.

However, there is still much work that needs to be done. Aging sewers, 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. 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. Cutting funding will slow restoration efforts, allowing problems to get worse and making them more expensive to solve. Ultimately, cutting spending as proposed won’t save money—it will cost the nation more. As the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans, 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 the region stands ready to continue this important federal partnership, ensuring that all benefit from and enjoy these investments in restoration and protection. 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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