



March 2, 2020

The Honorable Betty McCollum  
Chairwoman  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
2007 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Joyce  
Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman McCollum and Ranking Member Joyce:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to ask that you assure the Fiscal Year 2021 Interior, Environment, 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 ask you to support at least \$350 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). Restoration efforts are improving the lives of millions of people and work is underway or completed on more than 5,300 restoration projects throughout the region. These projects are benefiting communities by cleaning up the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans. Because of GLRI investments, we're seeing impressive results:

- 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.

Second, we ask you to support other Great Lakes programs that are the foundation upon which the success of the GLRI is built. We support the continued investment in the Great Lakes Science Center, a facility operated by the U.S. Geological Survey for essential ecosystem assessment and fisheries management research. We urge you to support the Science Center's work at \$17.5 million in the new fiscal year. Furthermore, the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act grant program operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service enhances cooperative conservation and regional habitat restoration efforts. The program in recent years has funded state and local efforts to restore fish and wildlife habitats and improve water quality in addition to providing grants for dam removals and wetland restorations. We support funding the program at \$8 million to address the great need that exists. Previous funding levels only supported 17% of proposals between 2011 and 2018.

Third, the threat of aquatic invasive species, like Asian carp, is real and persistent in our region. We urge Congress to provide \$50 million for the establishment of the new Great Lakes and Lake Champlain Invasive Species Monitoring program as authorized by the Frank LoBiondo Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-282). Funding the program will be a critical step in coordinating efforts to monitor and detect the introduction and spread of aquatic nuisance species into and within both systems, as well as informing, assisting, and managing prevention and response actions. Furthermore, 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, and sustain funding for existing programs. For example, we support \$25 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to continue leading monitoring efforts and implementing control and eradication tools and techniques. We also support \$11 million for the U.S. Geological Survey to fund further research into early detection practices and control technologies critical to slowing and responding to the range expansion of these threats to the basin.

Fourth, the successes of Great Lakes restoration efforts are based upon an array of critical national and other federal programs. Without these our region will fall short of our restoration goals, particularly if the federal agencies that are vital partners in our region see significant cuts to their essential functions. The Environmental Protection Agency, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, the National Park Service, and other bureaus within the Department of the Interior work hand in hand with Great Lakes states, cities, industries, Tribes, and non-governmental organizations. In providing critical administrative and programmatic support they help us ensure the success of both the GLRI and other restoration activities. Cuts to programs at the EPA and the Department of the Interior as proposed by the administration that are critical to protecting our waters, conserving our natural resources, and safeguarding public health are unacceptable.

Of great concern are the proposed cuts to programs that seek to address the growing need for water infrastructure investment. Communities across the Great Lakes region continue to grapple with crumbling, antiquated drinking water and wastewater infrastructure and are faced with a staggering \$179 billion in needed improvements, upgrades, and repairs over the next 20 years. The problem in urban and rural water systems and in economically disadvantaged communities is particularly acute, underscoring an urgency to address these issues for everyone. Sewer overflows pour millions of gallons of raw sewage into the Great Lakes and lead drinking water pipes threaten the health of families. The Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs) are two key sources of funds that communities depend on for financing to implement costly, but critical, wastewater and drinking water infrastructure projects necessary to address these threats. We urge you to fund both the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund to \$3.4 billion and \$2.32 billion respectively.

Support underserved communities drinking water needs by providing \$25.4 million for the Small and Disadvantaged Communities Grant program. Additionally, we ask that Congress fully fund the EPA Sec. 221 Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants program at \$225 million. These grants will directly help localities finance and sustainably address the threat of sewer overflows and polluted stormwater runoff to our waterways.

Furthermore, an array of grant programs administered by the EPA are essential in providing clean drinking water and improving infrastructure important for economic growth. We urge Congress to continue to fund the EPA Sec. 106 and 319 programs at \$231 and \$200 million respectively. Cutting or eliminating these categorical grants, as the budget request proposes, would eliminate hundreds of federally funded positions in state agencies that have the delegated responsibility to enforce critical laws like the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. This would hamper the ability of states to develop and operate their water quality standards, NPDES permit systems, and nonpoint source management programs; all programs critical to public.

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](mailto:clord@npca.org).

Sincerely,

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