



September 22, 2020

The Honorable John Barrasso, Chair
Committee on Environment & Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thomas Carper, Ranking Member
Committee on Environment & Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Peter DeFazio, Chair
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves, Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs Barrasso and DeFazio, and Ranking Members Carper and Graves:

As you know, federal investment in the water infrastructure of the Great Lakes Basin has greatly benefited the ecosystems and economies in our region. We appreciate both the House and Senate's ongoing efforts to reauthorize the Water Resources Development Act each Congress, which helps ensure that investments meet the evolving needs of this dynamic region.

As your committees work toward finalizing another authorization this year, we welcome your efforts with S. 3591, the *America's Water Infrastructure Act (AWIA)* as well as H.R. 7575, the *Water Resources Development Act of 2020 (WRDA)*. Each bill includes key priorities for the Great Lakes, and we are encouraged by Congress' continued commitment to the economic and environmental health of the Basin.

As both chambers begin negotiations to develop a unified bill, we urge the House and Senate to include the following provisions in the final bill:

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative:

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) remains a critically important program for the economic and environmental revitalization of the Great Lakes Basin. We support Congress' support for increasing this authorization and commend the Committee on Environment and Public Works for including a one-year reauthorization of GLRI at \$375 million for FY2022 as proposed in Section 3010. However, we urge Congress to include the full five-year reauthorization as proposed by S. 2295 and passed by the House under H.R. 4031 and H.R. 2, authorizing the GLRI through FY2026 with incremental increases to its original funding level of \$475 million.

Wastewater and Stormwater:

We appreciate both chambers' recognition of the urgent need to invest in water infrastructure. The eight Great Lakes states face a significant project backlog to maintain and upgrade wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. Investing in water infrastructure will address longstanding needs while creating jobs, protecting public health and strengthening local economies. For example, U.S. EPA recently announced that financing administered under the WIFIA program has created more than 15,000 jobs.

We urge Congress to include the following provisions in the final bill:

- S. 3591 – Section 2007 - reauthorization of the EPA Sec. 221 Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grant program
 - We urge consideration of Section 22106 of the House-passed H.R. 2, which authorizes this program at \$400 million annually for five years and includes special provisions for underserved communities.
- S. 3591 – Section 2012 & Section 2016 – Use of Clean Water State Revolving Funds & Reauthorization of Clean Water State Revolving Loan Funds
 - We urge consideration of Section 22113 of the H.R. 2, which authorizes the program at \$8 billion annually for five years

Great Lakes Ports and the Maritime Transportation System:

The Great Lakes Navigation System is a vital component of our regional economic infrastructure that generates more than 237,000 jobs and adds \$35 billion to the U.S. and Canadian economies. It is critical for the U.S. industrial base, with nearly 100% of the iron ore needed for U.S. steel production passing through the Soo Locks. The system faces serious maintenance needs due to years of inadequate investment, despite nearly \$9 billion of unspent revenue in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. Investments in the Great Lakes Navigation System will create jobs and modernize an important sector of our regional economy.

We urge Congress to include Section 102 of H.R. 7575, which would ensure that no less than 12% of annual funds appropriated from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers operation and maintenance activities be used for projects in the Great Lakes Navigation System.

Nutrient Pollution & Harmful Algal Blooms

Harmful algal blooms continue to threaten water quality and wildlife habitat in the Great Lakes Basin, closing beaches, killing wildlife, and impacting drinking water supplies.

We urge Congress to include the Harmful Algal Blooms Demonstration Program, found in both S. 3591 Section 1093/H.R. 7575 Section 128. These provisions will seek to determine the sources of, and how to effectively treat and eliminate, harmful algal blooms within the Great Lakes and other waters across the nation.

Asian Carp and other Aquatic Invasive Species:

We appreciate Congress' continued commitment to addressing aquatic invasive species, especially the threat of invasive Asian carp. Aquatic invasive species threaten habitat, native species, and the important fisheries that contribute to the economic vitality of the Great Lakes Basin. We urge Congress to include the following provisions in the final bill:

- H.R. 7575 – Section 401 – 402, which would authorize construction for the Brandon Road Lock & Dam, and would adopt special rules to authorize the federal cost share for construction at Brandon Road at 80% federal, 20% nonfederal and provide the Secretary with authority to include other technologies or measures not described in the Chiefs report.
- S. 3591 – Section 1602 – Invasive Species in Impaired Waters
- S. 3591 – Section 1603 – Aquatic Invasive Species Research
- S. 3591 – Section 1607 – Asian Carp Prevention and Control Pilot Program
- S. 3591 – Section 1608 – Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention

Resilience:

Communities across the Great Lakes Basin are heavily impacted by erosion, flooding and other effects from high lake levels and extreme weather events. Because lake levels are at all-time highs, these impacts are expected to continue. At the same time, weather events are becoming more frequent and severe, compounding the effects of fluctuating lake levels, which were at record lows less than a decade ago. Investments in resilience will enable Great Lakes states and localities to prepare for, respond to and build resilience to current and future impacts from high lake levels and severe weather events. This will address an urgent need for which other resources are not available. Investments in this area have high rates of job creation and have an excellent return on investment for taxpayers. Investments in resilience and mitigation are estimated to pay back to the taxpayer more than \$6 for every \$1 spent and create 39 jobs per \$1 million spent.

We urge Congress to include a study to address shoreline protection and resiliency due to high water levels in the Great Lakes. Proposals found in S. 3591 Section 1002 and H.R. 7575 Section 207 would address this need.

We also urge Congress to include the following provisions in a final bill:

- H.R. 7575 – Section 110 – Resiliency Planning Assistance. This section allows the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to provide technical assistance to nonfederal interests and other federal agencies to conduct resiliency planning to avoid repetitive flooding impacts and to anticipate, prepare and adapt to “changing climatic conditions and extreme weather events.”
- H.R. 7575 – Section 119 – Economically Disadvantaged Community Flood Protection and Hurricane and Storm Damage Reduction Study Pilot Program. This section is a positive step in addressing these needs creating a pilot program to weigh opportunities for USACE to address flood risk reduction needs for economically disadvantaged communities.
- H.R. 7575 – Section 120 – Permanent Measures to Reduce Emergency Flood Fighting Needs for Communities Subject to Repetitive Flooding. This section offers new authority for USACE to study, design and construct projects in communities that have experienced repetitive flooding events.

We are encouraged by the bipartisan, bicameral approach to advancing WRDA during the 116th Congress and look forward to working with you as negotiations continue. Thank you for your continued support of the Great Lakes Basin.

Respectfully Submitted:

Great Lakes Commission	Great Lakes Fishery Commission	Healing Our Waters – Great Lakes Coalition	Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative	Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority
American Great Lakes Ports Association	Great Lakes Metro Chambers Coalition		Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus	BlueGreen Alliance