

Supporting the Great Lakes: Priorities for the 117th Congress

The Great Lakes are national treasures. They power the region's economy, provide drinking water to tens of millions of Americans, and promote a healthy, outdoor way of life. The Great Lakes are vital to the people, communities, and economy of the eight-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Even with their majesty and size, the Great Lakes face serious and urgent threats compounded by climate change and the unjust and disproportionate burden of pollution and environmental harm to vulnerable communities.



The 117th Congress has the opportunity to forcefully and effectively address these challenges by championing clean water priorities that achieve ecological outcomes, address environmental injustices, and ensure all have access to clean and affordable water.

The Healing Our Waters–Great Lakes Coalition calls on Congress to prioritize a strong Great Lakes restoration and clean water platform:

Protect Access to Safe, Affordable, Water for All During the COVID-19 Health Crisis

Prioritize access to safe, affordable water during the Covid-19 public health crisis. Provide additional funding for the low-income assistance program, established in the most recent relief package, and aid to communities and utilities in support of a nationwide shutoff moratorium, ensuring safe household supply and reconnections. Congress must:

- Establish a nationwide shutoff moratorium, safely reconnecting households, and providing aid to communities and utilities to safely continue service.
- Expand the Low-Income Household Drinking Water and Wastewater Emergency Assistance Program.

Invest in Great Lakes Restoration, Clean Water Priorities, and Climate Resilience

Great Lakes restoration investments are producing economic and ecological results. But serious threats remain. Congress must continue supporting clean water and Great Lakes restoration priorities by increasing funding. Restoration investments, like the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), must prioritize commu-

nities that have historically borne the brunt of pollution and environmental harm—low-income communities, people of color, and Indigenous people. Great Lakes restoration investments can also address impacts from our changing climate through green infrastructure and habitat improvement projects, helping reduce flooding and other serious threats. A full summary of key programs and funding recommendations can be found [here](#). Congress must fund:

- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative: No less than \$375 million.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act: No less than \$8 million.
- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Great Lakes Science Center: No less than \$15 million.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps) Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program: No less than \$15 million.
- Army Corps Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study: No less than \$1.2 million.
- Defense against Asian carp through the FWS Asian Carp program, USGS Asian Carp program, and funding the preconstruction engineering and design of the Brandon Road Lock & Dam: \$25 million, \$11 million, and \$5 million, respectively.

Support Comprehensive Action on Water Infrastructure

The Great Lakes region faces a water infrastructure crisis. Grappling with crumbling and unsafe drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, communities need a staggering \$188 billion over the next 20 years to improve, upgrade, and repair drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems. This work is increasingly prohibitive with costs too often being passed on to our most vulnerable communities that are least able to afford it. Investing in water infrastructure protects public health and improves climate resiliency of our communities, reducing maintenance and operational costs, and creating good-paying local jobs. Congress must:

- Reauthorize and fund the EPA's Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds at \$10 billion annually (\$20 billion total).
- Prioritize disadvantaged communities through expanded grant set-asides and codifying the Green Project Reserve to promote the use of resilient natural infrastructure.
- Reauthorize and fund the EPA's Sec. 221 Sewer Overflow and Storm Reuse Municipal Grants at \$400 million annually.
- Establish a lead service line replacement program, investing \$45 billion over 10 years.
- End water shutoffs and establish a permanent low-income water assistance program that helps families with their household water bills.

Restore and Strengthen Clean Water Protections

With so many cities and towns living with unsafe water, we need to do more to protect our drinking water. Legacy pollutants persist. Contaminants like lead continue to poison drinking water, emerging contaminants like PFAS threaten human and environmental health, climate change is overwhelming aging infrastructure, and rollbacks to federal regulations have weakened clean water protections. Congress must make addressing these regional and national issues a priority:

- Strengthen federal Clean Water Act protections by establishing a scientifically driven, legally justifiable definition of Waters of the United States that ensures all streams, wetlands, and other waterways are protected.
- Mandate the establishment of drinking water standards for toxic PFAS, clarifying that dischargers are subject to limits under the Clean Water Act.
- Direct EPA to exercise its responsibility under the Clean Water Act to establish numeric water pollution standards for nutrients and other pollutants driving toxic algal blooms in our waters.
- Ensure the EPA protects the Great Lakes from aquatic invasive species by establishing a strong Vessel Incidental Discharge National Standard.



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. Follow us on Twitter @[healthylakes](https://twitter.com/healthylakes).

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