



March 12, 2021

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters – Great Lakes Coalition and our more than 165 member organizations, we write to urge you support the nomination of U.S. Representative Deb Haaland as Secretary of the Department of the Interior (DOI).

The Great Lakes are national treasures providing drinking water to over 30 million Americans, powering the region's economy, and promoting a healthy, outdoor way of life. These waters and lands are vital to the people of the eight-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. For over a century it has been the mission of the DOI and its bureaus to protect, manage, and conserve our waters, lands, and wildlife. Yet, the public lands and the natural resources that define our Great Lakes ecosystem are at risk from existing and emerging threats to our environment, compounded by the existential threat of climate change.

Rep. Haaland has the experience and is well positioned to lead and enhance the stewardship responsibilities of the DOI. As Vice Chair of the House Natural Resources Committee and Chair of the National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands subcommittee, she has built a deep understanding of the complex portfolios under the Department's purview. She stands ready to hit the ground running to manage the 70,000-strong workforce and address the varied issues facing the nearly 500 million acres of federal lands and more than 1.5 billion acres of offshore waters the Department stewards.

As a longtime advocate for clean water with a stellar bipartisan record, Rep. Haaland will listen to science and ensure the Interior Department fulfills its obligation to the public by protecting our region's lakes, rivers, and streams. Moreover, the threat of climate change compounds these challenges, disproportionately impacting our frontline, Indigenous, communities of color, or low-income communities. Rep. Haaland has shown a commitment to fight for climate action in protection of our iconic landscapes and an understanding that for our most vulnerable communities, climate change is not a distant threat but an immediate danger to their health and way of life.

Thankfully, over the past decade we have seen real progress towards restoring and protecting the Great Lakes and our communities. DOI bureaus such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), National Park Service (NPS), and the Bureau of Indian Affairs work hand in hand with Great Lakes states, cities, Tribes, and non-governmental organizations to advance regional environmental restoration efforts under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). Federal investments in the GLRI have supported thousands of projects that are putting people to work cleaning up toxic sediments, restoring habitats and native fisheries, stopping the spread of invasive species, improving ecosystem

resilience, and yielding environmental and economic results. Even with these accomplishments, serious threats remain, and there is much work to do as new threats emerge and climate change exacerbates the threats the region faces. Moreover, we must ensure our restoration efforts are equitable so that our most vulnerable and underserved communities benefit from restoration investments and create more equal opportunity for all Americans to access and enjoy our public lands and waters.

Rep. Haaland's historic nomination cannot be understated. If confirmed, she would become the first Native American to lead DOI and the first Native American Cabinet Secretary in our nation's history. Her experience makes her eminently qualified to take a pivotal role in the much needed and overdue steps toward reckoning with a legacy of broken promises to Tribal communities and ensure the federal government begins the process of building lasting, equitable partnerships between nations.

Rep. Haaland has the experience and shown the leadership needed to guide the Department forward, proving herself ready to address the existential threat of climate change to our region, enhance Great Lakes restoration, and to work in collaboration with our communities and Tribal Nations to ensure DOI creates equitable opportunities for all American to enjoy our public lands and waters. We are pleased to offer our support for this nomination.

If you have any questions, please reach out to our Coalition's Policy Director, Chad Lord, at (202) 257-4365 or clord@npca.org.

Sincerely,

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