



April 21, 2021

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
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 Pingree and Ranking Member Joyce:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to urge you support robust funding for Great Lakes restoration and clean water priorities in the Fiscal Year 2022 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. 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 as legacy pollutants persist, well-known contaminants like lead continue to make drinking water unsafe, emerging contaminants like PFAS are being uncovered, climate change is overwhelming aging infrastructure, and the COVID-19 pandemic further threatens our most vulnerable communities who lack access to clean and affordable water. These challenges we face will only get worse, and the price we pay will only rise unless Congress strengthens its commitment to clean water in the region and across the nation.

First, we ask you to support at least \$375 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 5,400 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 are seeing impressive results:

- Four Areas of Concern – Presque Isle, Pa.; Deer Lake, Mich.; White Lake, Mich.; and Lower Menominee River, Mich. & Wisc. – have been delisted since the GLRI began. The management actions necessary to delist 10 additional AOCs have also been completed. In the previous two decades before the GLRI, only one AOC had been cleaned up.

- 90 beneficial use impairments (BUIs) were addressed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin under the GLRI, nine 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 1.5 million pounds.
- Over 5,400 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 dedicated funding, \$50 million, for the establishment of the 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 2021 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 which our region will fall short of our restoration goals. 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. Additionally, incorporating environmental justice in every aspect of these agencies work is critical. Recognizing the historic health and environmental inequities many have faced, and ensuring we begin to address these

disproportionate impacts is an important step in protecting our most vulnerable communities and ensuring the benefits of restoration are enjoyed by all across the region. We urge the Subcommittee provide additional resources to effectively staff and conduct this much needed work.

Fifth, the Great Lakes region is facing a water infrastructure crisis. Grappling with crumbling and unsafe drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, our communities need a staggering \$188 billion over the next 20 years to improve, upgrade, and repair drinking water and wastewater systems. This work is increasingly unaffordable as the federal contribution has declined precipitously over the last 4 decades, falling from 63 percent of water infrastructure spending to 9 percent today. Too often these costs are being passed on to those who can least afford it, disproportionately impacting communities that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice with water utility bills doubling or tripling over the last decade in many cities.

These challenges are only expected to get worse as a changing climate leads to more rainstorms that overwhelm sewer systems and contaminate drinking water sources, pushing our current infrastructure past its limits. Investing in our region's water infrastructure would not only protect public health but allow for important infrastructure upgrades improving the resiliency of our communities, reducing maintenance and operational costs, and creating good paying local jobs during this economic crisis. 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 fund both the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) at \$10 billion each. Providing greater granting and matching flexibility during this pandemic induced economic downturn, ensuring states prioritize investments in our most vulnerable communities, and continuing the 20 percent green infrastructure set-aside to promote the further adoption of resilient and cost-effective natural infrastructure solutions.

Moreover, sewer overflows pour millions of gallons of raw sewage into the Great Lakes and lead drinking water pipes threaten the health of families. We ask the Subcommittee support underserved communities drinking water needs by providing \$60 million for the Small and Disadvantaged Communities Grant program, fund the EPA Sec. 221 Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants program at \$400 million, and begin to work towards a national lead service line replacement program by supporting increased funding for EPA's Reducing Lead in Drinking Water Program. These grants will directly help localities finance and sustainably address the threat of sewer overflows, polluted stormwater runoff to our waterways, and lead in our drinking water.

In addition, 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 increase its support for state water quality management programs by funding the EPA Sec. 106 and 319 programs at \$500 and \$250 million, respectively. These programs support thousands 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. Ensuring states have the ability 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.

Still much work needs to be done. Aging sewers, invasive species, and toxic pollutants threaten 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. With the economic downturn hamstringing community investment and exposing the unaffordability of water for so many families, it is critical that Congress provide robust funding through grants in the year ahead. Allowing these problems to get worse will only put our communities at risk and make them more expensive to solve.

As the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans and the heart of our regional economy, the nation cannot afford to stop protecting and restoring the Great Lakes. 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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