



April 21, 2021

The Honorable Matt Cartwright
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
H-310 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cartwright and Ranking Member Aderholt:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to urge you support robust funding for Great Lakes restoration in the Fiscal Year 2022 Commerce, Justice, Science, 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 threats, that if unaddressed will only get worse and the price we pay will be much higher if Congress fails to strengthen its federal partnership with the region during this health and economic crisis.

First, we ask you to support Great Lakes science and restoration by fully funding critical National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) programs. NOAA is an important federal partner to the region and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), conducting research and leading efforts such as harmful algal bloom forecasting, marine debris monitoring, and habitat restoration. Its leadership and partnership is essential, without which our restoration efforts would fall short of our region's needs and goals.

These critical programs include the Great Lakes Environmental Research Lab, operated by NOAA. The lab conducts innovative research on the dynamic environments and ecosystems of the region's water system that is critical in informing the restoration and management of safe and sustainable ecosystems, ecosystem services, and communities. Its investigations have included analyses of the food web changes since the Zebra and Quagga mussel invasion, the impacts of climate change, the development of coastal forecast systems, and harmful algal bloom forecasting. We urge the subcommittee to continue supporting this work by designating \$10 million in funding for the continued operation of the lab. We also support \$3 million for the Great Lakes Observing System. As part of a vast network, the system is a core component of the information infrastructure critical to safe navigation across the Lakes and responding to toxic spills, storms, and other coastal hazards.

Second, the growing threat of harmful algal blooms is of great concern to the region. New blooms are being fueled by excessive amounts of phosphorus washing into the lakes from urban and agricultural runoff. Moreover, stronger storms driven by climate change and the ecosystem impact of invasive mussels contribute to the problem. These harmful algal blooms close beaches, kill fish, impact local drinking water supplies (like Toledo, Ohio, in 2014), and when water supplies are contaminated, the most vulnerable members of the community are the first to be impacted. The Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act program empowers NOAA to work collaboratively with research partners to engage with this threat in the Great Lakes. Research seeks to use an integrated approach to understand the ecosystem dynamics and environmental drivers of these blooms to improve prediction and mitigation strategies. Harmful algal blooms are spreading farther and faster and beginning earlier than ever before and we must act to protect communities from this growing threat. We urge Congress to fund NOAA's activities by providing at least \$25 million for the program and its Competitive External Research grants.

We also urge Congress to continue supporting the other programs and partnerships that collaboratively support and enhance regional restoration efforts. The Sea Grant College program provides for a federal partnership with academic and research institutions to educate and inform the public on maintaining resilient communities and economies, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, healthy coastal ecosystems, and promoting environmental literacy and workforce development. We support \$107.9 million for the program in the new fiscal year. Furthermore, we urge Congress appropriate \$78.5 million for the Coastal Zone Management Grants. These grants are critical in supporting the participation of underfunded state agencies in the voluntary Coastal Zone Management Program that brings about coordination between state and federal regulators for the restoration and responsible development of our coastal communities and resources. We also support \$15 million for the Marine Debris Program that coordinates regional efforts for the prevention, research, monitoring, emergency response, and removal of debris, an effort that benefits coastal habitats, wildlife, and protects the public who use our region's waterways.

Third, we ask the Committee to support the efforts of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). NOAA is one of the critical contributing partners to the GLRI, an agency that is supplemented and enhanced by the GLRI and provides critical research capacity for the Great Lakes Region. The initiative is improving the lives of millions of people and has seen efforts undertaken or completed on more than 5,400 restoration projects throughout the region. Projects that are benefiting communities by cleaning up waters that are the drinking source for millions of homes and thousands of industries.

Investments in Great Lakes restoration create jobs and lead to long-term economic benefits for the region 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,

Marjorie Mulcahy
Treasurer
Advocates for a Clean Lake Erie

Molly M. Flanagan
COO and Vice President, Programs
Alliance for the Great Lakes

Marnie Urso
Policy Director
Audubon Great Lakes

Erin McGrath
Policy Manager
Audubon New York

Sandra C Morrissey
President
Bronx River - Sound Shore Audubon
Society

Brian Smith
Associate Executive Director
Citizens Campaign for the Environment

Barbara Warren, RN, MS
Executive Director
Citizens' Environmental Coalition

Steve Schultz
Water Program Coordinator
Clean Water Action

Mark Redsten
President/CEO
Clean Wisconsin

Bryan Stubbs
President & Executive Director
Cleveland Water Alliance

Rob Mrowka
President
Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County
(NY)

Ruth Battaglia CSA
Sister
Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes

Amy Beyer
Director
Conservation Resource Alliance

Joe Tomandl
Executive Director
Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship

William Schleizer
CEO
Delta Institute

James N Bull
Environmental Policy Coordinator
Detroit Audubon

Kyle Rorah
Regional Director of Public Policy
Ducks Unlimited

Rebecca Meuninck
Deputy Director
Ecology Center

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Deputy Director
Ecology Center

Rob Hayes
Director of Clean Water
Environmental Advocates NY

Howard Learner
Executive Director
Environmental Law & Policy Center

Rebecca Fedewa
Executive Director
Flint River Watershed Coalition

Liz Kirkwood
Executive Director
For Love of Water (FLOW)

Joyann Cirigliano
President
Four Harbors Audubon Society

Kristy Meyer
Associate Director
Freshwater Future

Margaret Frisbie
Executive Director
Friends of the Chicago River

Marie McCormick
Executive Director
Friends of the Rouge

Mike Carlson
Executive Director
Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for
Land Trusts

Stephanie Prellwitz
Executive Director
Green Lake Association

Ivan J hack jr
President
Headwaters Chapter Izaak Walton League

Sr. Rose Therese Nolta
Justice and Peace Coordinator
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC

Melissa Sinka
Recording Secretary
Huntington-Oyster Bay Audubon Society

Brad Jensen
Executive Director
Huron Pines

Rebecca Esselman
Executive Director
Huron River Watershed Council

Edward L Michael
Government Affairs Chair
Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited

Iyana Simba
Clean Water Policy Director
Illinois Environmental Council

Keith Halper
President
Indiana Division - Izaak Walton League of
America

Emily Wood
Executive Director
Indiana Wildlife Federation

Keith Halper
State President, Indiana Division
Izaak Walton League of America

Don E Robertson
Vice President
Izaak Walton League of America Penn.
State Division

Alicia Smith
Community Liaison
Junction Coalition

Paul Pacholski
President
Lake Erie Charter Boat Association

Tom Mlada
Executive Director
Lakeshore Natural Resource Partnership

Allyson Haut
President
League of Women Voters of Illinois

Barbara Schilling and Linda Hanson
Co-Presidents
League of Women Voters of Indiana

Terese Grant
President
League of Women Voters of Iowa

Christina Schlitt
President
League of Women Voters of Michigan

Louise Petering
President
League of Women Voters of Wisconsin

Elizabeth Joy Guscott-Mueller
President
League of Women Voters-Lake Michigan
Region

Bentley Johnson
Senior Partnerships Manager
Michigan League of Conservation Voters

Ian FitzGerald
Policy Coordinator
Michigan United Conservation Clubs

Maureen Taylor
State Chairperson
Michigan Welfare Rights Organization

Cheryl A Nenn
Riverkeeper
Milwaukee Riverkeeper

Brenda Coley
Co-Executive Director
Milwaukee Water Commons

Steve Morse
Executive Director
Minnesota Environmental Partnership

Caitlin Wall
Water Policy Manager
National Audubon Society

Lynn McClure
Senior Director
National Parks Conservation Association

Mike Shriberg
Great Lakes Regional Executive Director
National Wildlife Federation

Melinda Hughes
President
Nature Abounds

Elizabeth Moran
Environmental Policy Director
New York Public Interest Research Group
(NYPIRG)

Jennifer Wilson Pines
Conservation Chair
North Shore Audubon Society

Larry Federman
President
Northern Catskills Audubon Society

Matt Misicka
Executive Director
Ohio Conservation Federation

Pete Bucher
Managing Director Water Policy
Ohio Environmental Council

Maryanne Adams
Conservation Chair
Onondaga Audubon

Kristina Patterson
Executive Director
Partners for Clean Streams

Jacquelyn Bonomo
President & CEO
PennFuture

Kathy Slesar OP
Vice-President
Racine Dominicans

Irene Senn
Coordinator
Religious Coalition for the Great Lakes

Lori Andresen
President
Save Our Sky Blue Waters

Natalie Johnson
Executive Director
Save the Dunes Conservation Fund

John Peach
Executive Director
Save The River Upper St. Lawrence
Riverkeeper

Anne Swaim
Executive Director
Saw Mill River Audubon

Tim Dewane
JPIC Director
School Sisters of Notre Dame - CP JPIC
Office

Leigh Fabens
President
Shaker Lakes Garden Club

Kate Bartholomew
Chair
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter

Erma Leaphart
Organizer
Sierra Club Michigan Chapter

Robert F. Shields
Steering Committee; Chair, Conservation
Committee
Sierra Club Ohio

Jill Haberman
Justice and Peace Animator
Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi (St. Francis,
WI)

Phyllis Tierney
Coordinator, Sisters of St. Joseph of
Rochester Justice & Peace Office
Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester Justice &
Care for Creation Committee

Brien Weiner
President
South Shore Audubon Society

Sarah Damron
Southeast, Texas, and Great Lakes Regional
Manager
Surfrider Foundation

Kelly Reed
Senior Vice President, Government
Relations
The Conservation Fund

Jennifer McKay
Policy Director
Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council

Taylor Ridderbusch
Great Lakes Organizer
Trout Unlimited

Mary Ellen Miller
President-elect
Upper Mississippi River Region of the
League of Women Voters

Lisa Patrell
Co-founder
Washtenaw350

Monica LewisPatrick
CEO
We the People of Detroit

Bill Wood
Executive Director
West Michigan Environmental Action
Council

Steven Berk
Director of Public Policy
Western Reserve Land Conservancy

Diane Lembck
President
Wisconsin Metro Audubon Society

Mike Kuhr
State Council Chair
Wisconsin Trout Unlimited