



June 23, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition and 92 of our member organizations, we urge Congress to include robust funding for the economic and environmental revitalization of our Great Lakes and communities as it develops and passes a bold comprehensive infrastructure package in the months ahead. In particular, we call on Congress to include \$1.5 billion for the Great Lakes Legacy Act and Area of Concern (AOC) program operated by Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Great Lakes National Program Office under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). The harmful legacy of decades of pollution in these toxic hot spots threaten our communities with cancer-causing contaminants, drinking water restrictions, fish consumption advisories, and disconnect us from our waters. The clean-up of these sites is essential to revitalizing our waterfronts and protecting the health of our communities, fish and wildlife.

The Great Lakes are national treasures powering our economy, providing drinking water to over 30 million Americans, and defining our region's way of life. The Lakes are vital to the people of the United States and in particular the communities of the eight-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. These waters support jobs, commerce, agriculture, transportation, and tourism for millions of people across the country.

Unfortunately, the Great Lakes face serious and urgent threats as decades of environmental damage threaten public health, economic development, and the waters we all rely on. This legacy of pollution is no more clearly felt than in sites of extreme toxic contamination and environmental degradation known as Areas of Concern (AOCs). These 30 sites found across the region, together with degraded former industrial sites or brownfields, are significant impediments to community and economic revitalization. Public health and economic damages from these sites have also disproportionately impacted our most vulnerable communities, including people of color, low-income people, and Indigenous tribes.

Through the Great Lakes Legacy Act, supplemented by the GLRI, the EPA has successfully accelerated the restoration of AOCs. Since 2004, the EPA has mobilized strong collaborative

partnerships with states, federal agencies, municipalities, and businesses while leveraging millions of dollars from non-federal sponsors to clean up these sites. This work is yielding dramatic results:

- Four Areas of Concern – Presque Isle, Pa.; Deer Lake, Mich.; White Lake, Mich.; and Lower Menominee River, Mich. & Wisc. – have been delisted since 2010. 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.
- 91 beneficial use impairments (BUIs), the benchmarks of environmental harm characterizing AOCs, have been addressed under the GLRI—more than nine times the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years.
- A 2018 report showed that for every GLRI dollar spent through 2016 in cleaning up toxic hot spots in Areas of Concern, controlling invasive species, restoring wildlife habitat, protecting wetlands, and reducing harmful algae will produce \$3.35 in additional economic activity through 2036. An over 3-to-1 return on investment.

Substantial progress has been and is being made through the GLRI's AOC program, though much work remains:

- 16 Areas of Concern still await planning and completion of management actions, another 10 await delisting in the coming years.
- 155 BUIs remain to be addressed, continuing to impact public health and hampering economic development in many of our communities.

As we look to the future, the EPA in collaboration with state, local, and non-federal cost-share partners have been working diligently to continue to make progress. Over the next 5 years, it is estimated that construction and restoration projects likely to move forward across 14 AOCs require an estimated \$1.5 billion in federal funding, potentially leveraging over \$650 million in non-federal investment. Without an increased federal commitment, this potential could go unmet as existing funding trends are estimated to only meet a third of the identified federal need in the coming years, prolonging public health threats and delaying community and economic revitalization.

The region stands ready to get to work to continue this important federal partnership and is working to accelerate local participation and community engagement so that all people may benefit from and enjoy these investments in restoration and protection. We cannot afford to slow down, as the longer we wait, the more difficult and expensive the solutions will become.

The Great Lakes are critical infrastructure for the nation and in our region. We ask you to include \$1.5 billion in additional funding for the EPA's Areas of Concern program as part of any infrastructure package Congress considers this year.

Sincerely,

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