

# Water Infrastructure and the Great Lakes Region

## The Problem

The Great Lakes region faces a water infrastructure crisis. Lead pipes poison drinking water. Emerging contaminants like toxic PFAS threaten human and environmental health. Water main breaks curtail service and can result in sink holes in streets. Sewage overflows close beaches. And the cost to fix these problems are causing skyrocketing water bills that many families struggle to afford. The problem is massive: According to the EPA, the Great Lakes states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin need more than \$225 billion to improve, upgrade, and repair drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems. This work is very expensive, stretching the budgets of local communities that pass down costs to residents who, in many cases, are least able to afford higher water bills.

Further, federal water infrastructure investments have decreased significantly over the last 50 years—exacerbating the problem and putting additional strain on communities.



Additionally, climate change is leading to more intense storms and rainfall that are overwhelming aging infrastructure and exacerbating many threats to our Great Lakes and communities, including polluted runoff that causes toxic algal blooms, sewage overflows that close beaches, and flooding that jeopardizes homes, businesses, and communities.

Water rates are becoming increasingly unaffordable for families. From 2012 to 2021, water rates increased by 43 percent across the country.

With so many communities living with unsafe water, we need to do more to protect our waters and improve drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems.

Investing in water infrastructure protects public and ecosystem health, while helping communities prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate change, reducing maintenance and operational costs of our water systems, and creating good-paying local jobs.

Figure 1: Great Lakes Region Infrastructure Investment Needs

	 Wastewater Infrastructure Need over 20 Years	 Drinking Water Infrastructure Need over 20 Years	Total Infrastructure Need over 20 Years
Illinois	\$6.537 billion	\$22.211 billion	\$28.748 billion
Indiana	\$7.162 billion	\$11.784 billion	\$18.946 billion
Michigan	\$2.077 billion	\$16.258 billion	\$18.335 billion
Minnesota	\$2.389 billion	\$10.178 billion	\$12.567 billion
New York	\$31.439 billion	\$35.148 billion	\$66.587 billion
Ohio	\$14.587 billion	\$16.072 billion	\$30.659 billion
Pennsylvania	\$6.950 billion	\$24.301 billion	\$31.251 billion
Wisconsin	\$6.329 billion	\$11.756 billion	\$18.085 billion
<b>Total Need</b>	<b>\$77.470 billion</b>	<b>\$147.706 billion</b>	<b>\$225.176 billion</b>

Data from the EPA's "Clean Watersheds Needs Survey 2012 Report to Congress" and the agency's 2018 "Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment."

## The Solutions

Years of underinvestment in our communities' water infrastructure is threatening the health of our communities and our Great Lakes. While federal investments are producing results, serious threats remain. We need to put forward investments commensurate with the challenge at hand—dramatically accelerating progress to restore the Great Lakes and protect the drinking water and the health of millions of people.

Passage of the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in the fall of 2021 has led to billions of dollars of new federal funding to help communities upgrade their water infrastructure. Now, communities and utilities are ready to get to work. To help communities and to realize the full potential of this historic legislation, Congress must fully fund the investments authorized in the bill in fiscal year 2025 and support relevant agencies with the equitable implementation of these funds. The Healing Our Waters—Great Lakes Coalition urges Congress provide no less than:

- **\$4.9 billion** for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF)
- **\$4.4 billion** for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF)
- **\$280 million** for the Sec. 221 Sewer Overflow and Storm Water Reuse Municipal Grants

Federal investments in water infrastructure must also seek to address the impacts of climate change, prioritizing resilience and promoting the use of natural infrastructure, whereby natural landscape features such as wetlands, rain gardens, parks, and bioswales absorb storm water and prevent infrastructure from being overwhelmed. These solutions help mitigate flooding and pollution from runoff, and provide new habitat and green space while reducing maintenance costs and developing good-paying local jobs.

Moreover, federal investments must tackle the biggest problems in communities that have been hit hardest by pollution and harm, from urban communities dealing with toxic lead contamination to rural communities dealing with failing home sewage treatment systems. Federal and state agencies must invest in staffing to ensure equitable implementation of investments, as well as building the capacity to improve community engagement and provide technical assistance for the most under resourced communities to access these assistance programs. Federal and state programs must also maximize funding provided as grants or forgivable loans to keep communities from falling further into debt and then passing on rising costs to residents.



Since 2004, the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition has been harnessing the collective power of more than 185 groups representing millions of people, whose common goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes. Learn more at [HealthyLakes.org](https://HealthyLakes.org) or follow us on Twitter, Facebook, Bluesky, Mastodon, and Threads [@HealthyLakes](https://twitter.com/HealthyLakes).

### CONTACT US. WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

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