



May 15, 2023

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to urge you to support robust funding for Great Lakes restoration and clean water priorities in the Fiscal Year 2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. We are grateful for the much needed support the region has received in recent years. Federal investments are restoring the lakes, our communities, and protecting drinking water in communities across Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

However, the Great Lakes and the communities that rely on them still face many urgent problems as legacy pollutants persist, well-known contaminants like lead continue to make drinking water unsafe and unaffordable, emerging contaminants like PFAS are being uncovered, and climate change overwhelms aging infrastructure threatening our most vulnerable communities. Cuts to EPA and DOI budgets will only serve to exacerbate these threats, harming Great Lakes communities and our regional economy. These challenges 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 through robust appropriations in FY2024.

First, we ask you to support at least \$425 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 7,300 restoration projects throughout the region. These projects are benefiting communities, strengthening their resilience to climate impacts and cleaning up the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans. Because of GLRI investments, we are seeing impressive results:

- 5 Areas of Concern – Presque Isle, Pa.; Deer Lake, Mich.; White Lake, Mich.; Lower Menominee River, Mich. & Wis.; and Ashtabula River, Ohio – 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.

- 103 beneficial use impairments (BUIs) have been addressed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin under the GLRI, over 10 times the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years.
- 2.2 million farmland acres in priority watersheds have received technical and financial support to implement nutrient management actions. Conservation efforts across the Great Lakes have resulted in a projected reduction of 2 million pounds of phosphorus runoff, a major contributor to toxic algal blooms.
- Over 6,000 river miles have been cleared of dams and barriers resulting in fish swimming into stretches of river where they have been absent for decades and increasing biodiversity overall.
- More than 460,000 acres of habitat, including 65,000 acres of coastal wetlands, have been enhanced, protected, and restored enhancing ecosystem and community resilience.

Second, we ask you to support the agencies essential to implementing Great Lakes restoration through robust topline funding for the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, and others. Funding increases are vital not only for on-the-ground investments but for building agency capacity to effectively implement programs, advance critical scientific investigations, and enhance community engagement efforts. For too long, agencies have been under resourced, impacting their ability to effectively engage with those communities who have long felt the impact of environmental injustices. We must invest in our federal commitment to ensure these communities are fully engaged in restoration efforts and directly benefit from these programs.

Third, we ask you to support the continued investment in key Great Lakes programs that are the foundation upon which the success of the GLRI is built. We urge you to support the Great Lakes Science Center, a U.S. Geological Survey operated facility essential to ecosystem assessment and fisheries management research, at \$15 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.

Fourth, the ongoing damage of current invasive species and potential impacts of future aquatic invasive species, like invasive 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 invasive carp out of the Great Lakes we ask Congress to fully fund all actions taken as part of the Invasive Carp Action Plan and sustain funding for existing programs. For example, we support \$35 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 \$15 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.

Fifth, the Great Lakes region is facing a water infrastructure crisis that impacts the drinking water and the health of local communities. Grappling with crumbling and unsafe drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, our communities need a staggering \$225 billion over 20 years to improve, upgrade, and repair drinking water and wastewater systems. This work is increasingly unaffordable, as costs are too often 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.

While we still celebrate the historic investment provided under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58), we recognize that this supplemental funding must enhance and not supplant increased annual investments through regular appropriations. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's supplemental funds are boosting on-the-ground investments that will benefit communities across the country; but they alone will not put an end to the serious threats to our water resources that communities are facing. More so, as climate change leads to more severe storms and flooding that overwhelm sewer systems and contaminate drinking water sources, pushing our current infrastructure past its limits. That is why Congress authorized robust annual appropriations alongside these supplemental funds, to provide the much-needed resources to build upon and sustain these key investments.

Investing in our region's water infrastructure protects public health and allows for important infrastructure upgrades to improve the resiliency of our communities, reduce maintenance and operational costs, and create good-paying local jobs. EPA's Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds are two key sources of funds that communities depend on for financing to implement costly, but critical, wastewater and drinking water infrastructure projects. We urge you to fund both the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) at \$4.64 billion and \$4.13 billion, respectively, as authorized. Additionally, we ask the subcommittee provide greater granting and matching flexibility for these programs, ensuring states prioritize investments in our most vulnerable communities with up to 40 percent being available for grants, and continuing the 20 percent green infrastructure set-aside under the CWSRF to promote the further adoption of resilient and cost-effective natural infrastructure solutions.

Moreover, challenges such as lead drinking water pipes and sewer overflows pouring millions of gallons of raw sewage into the Great Lakes threaten the health of families. We ask the Subcommittee support underserved communities drinking water needs by providing \$100 million for EPA's Small and Disadvantaged Communities Grant program, \$280 million for the EPA Sec. 221 Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants program, and continue to work towards a national lead service line replacement program by supporting \$200 million 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 \$200 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. Furthermore, these funds ensure 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 health, clean drinking water, and ecosystem protection.

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 every \$1 the GLRI invested to clean up toxic hot spots in Areas of Concern (AOC), control invasive species, restore wildlife habitat, protect wetlands, and reduce toxic algal blooms will produce more than \$3 in additional economic activity regionwide over 20 years. 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 wildlife and public 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. We need to tackle these serious threats now, otherwise the problems will only get worse and more expensive to solve.

As the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans and the heart of our regional economy, the Great Lakes is not a resource the nation can afford to stop protecting and restoring. It is critical that Congress provide robust funding for Great Lakes restoration and clean water priorities in the Fiscal Year 2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. 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 reach out to our Coalition's Senior Legislative Analyst, Alexis Lopez-Cepero (alopez-cepero@npca.org).

Sincerely,

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