



May 15, 2023

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Barbara Lee
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Mario Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to urge you to support robust funding for Great Lakes restoration in the Fiscal Year 2024 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill. We are grateful for the much needed support the region has received. We share these waters with our Canadian neighbors and our joint efforts are seeing on-the-ground results because of the investments across the region on both sides of the border. 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 crisis and economic downturn.

First, we ask you to support the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission. Canada and the U.S. share this valuable resource that boasts a fishery worth more than \$7 billion annually to the region, in addition to providing drinking water to over 30 million Americans and supporting nearly one-third of U.S. and Canadian economic activity. Working together to protect this fishery is an essential step in ensuring the continued restoration of the waters and the region, in addition to safeguarding a sustainable and thriving economic future. We urge Congress to continue its support for the Commission's critical fisheries and invasive species management efforts, providing no less than \$53.8 million in the new fiscal year.

Second, we ask the Committee to support the efforts of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). The State Department is an important contributor to this effort, coordinating our international partnership to protect these waters without which critical restoration targets could not be met. Ongoing efforts are improving the lives of millions of people and the GLRI has undertaken or completed over 7,300 restoration projects throughout the region. These projects are benefiting communities by cleaning up waters that are the drinking source for millions of homes and thousands of industries.

Working together with our neighbors' results in greater coordinated investments in Great Lakes restoration, which creates jobs and leads to long-term economic benefits for the region and

the country. It is estimated that for 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 harmful algae the investment 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. A combined effort that cannot be accomplished without engaging and coordinating fully with the Canadian government, Provinces, communities, and tribes.

Still much work needs to be done. Algal blooms, 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. 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 40 million Americans and Canadians and the heart of our binational economy, the nation cannot afford to stop protecting and restoring the Great Lakes. Progress is being made and the region stands ready to continue this important federal partnership, ensuring that all benefit from and enjoy these investments in restoration and protection. We urge you to ensure that the fiscal year 2024 appropriations bills fund the efforts of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission at \$53.8 million.

If you have questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact our Coalition's Senior Legislative Analyst, Alexis Lopez-Cepero, at alopez-cepero@npca.org.

Sincerely,

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