

**Testimony by Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition to the
House Committee on Appropriations' Subcommittee on the Department of the Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies Regarding the
Department of the Interior and Environment Appropriations Act, 2015
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Members of the subcommittee. It is an honor to provide this testimony about one of our world's most prized natural and economic treasures – our Great Lakes. The Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition joins a bi-partisan group of 46 Representatives in asking you to support \$300 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative in fiscal year 2015. We appreciate the trust you have shown the region over the last four years and ask you to maintain this support.

Our Coalition is comprised of more than 120 environmental, conservation, hunting, and fishing organizations; museums, zoos, and aquariums; and businesses representing millions of people whose goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes. We came together to fight for the Great Lakes, and we recognize the need for Federal assistance for all great waters, including Puget Sound, the Everglades, Coastal Louisiana, and Chesapeake Bay.

Mr. Chairman and ranking member, 30 million people rely on the Great Lakes for their drinking water, and the entire country benefits from the commerce that depends on these waters. Protecting and restoring them is a huge non-partisan priority for the people in the region. We recognize that the Federal government is our partner in an endeavor to help heal the lakes through the undertaking of one of the world's largest freshwater ecosystem restoration projects. Non-governmental groups, industries, cities, and states are forging public-private partnerships to clean up toxic hot spots, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and combat invasive species. Our Coalition has invested almost half a million dollars of our own resources to help our member groups restore and protect this resource. The philanthropic community has also invested approximately \$100 million over the past four years through initiatives to educate citizens and policy makers about the Great Lakes environment and to identify actions and policies that most effectively will restore its health.

Economic Benefits

We do this work because cleaning up the Great Lakes is critical for the health and quality of life of the region. It also drives economic development – and jobs – in communities all around the Basin. Investments in Great Lakes restoration are creating jobs and leading to long-term economic benefits for the Great Lakes states and the country. A Brookings Institution report shows that every \$1 invested in Great Lakes restoration generates at least \$2 in return, making Great Lakes restoration one of the best investments on the dollar in the federal budget. Research from Grand Valley State University shows that the return for certain projects is closer to 6-to-1. The University of Michigan has also demonstrated that over 1.5 million jobs are connected to the Great Lakes, accounting for more than \$60 billion in wages annually. According to the Great Lakes Commission, more than 37 million people boat, fish, hunt, and view wildlife in the region,

generating over \$50 billion annually. Great Lakes businesses and individuals account for about 28 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product, according to Bureau of Economic Analysis data.

We have also seen jobs being created by our nation's efforts to clean up the Great Lakes and restore fish and wildlife habitat. These jobs include wetland scientists, electricians, engineers, landscape architects, plumbers, truck drivers, and many others. While we do not know how many jobs have been created to clean up the Great Lakes, it is likely in the thousands. Consider:

- 125 jobs were created for a \$10 million project to restore fish and wildlife habitat in Muskegon Lake, a Great Lakes Area of Concern in Michigan.
- 177 people are employed to control the invasive sea lamprey in the Great Lakes, which costs the U.S. government around \$20 million annually.
- 174 jobs were created, some of which were filled by at-risk youth, to remove dams and other barriers in a 150-mile stretch of the Milwaukee River system.

Specifically, stories like that of business owner Jim Nichols of Carry Manufacturing are increasingly common. Jim tells of how GLRI projects are adding new orders for his manufacturing business. Carry Manufacturing has manufactured water control equipment since 1987. Their employees are being kept busy building submersible pumps for GLRI projects that flood duck habitat or drain areas to re-establish native habitat for sport fishing. The jobs add up when you begin counting the men and women at other companies who manufacture the pipes for the pumps, the control structures in which the pumps are housed, and the hunters, anglers, and wildlife watchers that benefit from the improved environment the pumps help create.

Investments Producing Results

The people that have been put to work protecting and restoring the Great Lakes are working on projects that are producing results (from EPA's 2014 congressional budget justification and 2013 report to Congress):

- The Presque Isle, PA, Area of Concern was delisted, the first since 2006, and the second U.S. AOC since they were established in 1987. The management actions necessary for delisting the Sheboygan, WI, AOC were also completed, Ashtabula, OH, is very close, and two more de-listings are expected in FY 2015. (EPA 2014)
- Between 2010 through 2013, 29 beneficial use impairments (BUIs) at 13 AOCs were removed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, more than tripling the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years. More BUIs have been removed since the GLRI began than between 1987 and 2009. (EPA 2014)
- From 2004 to 2009, the Great Lakes region was the only area in the country to show a gain in wetland acreage. Now the GLRI is building on that foundation with a goal to restore one million acres in the Basin. So far, the FWS, NPS, NRCS, and NOAA (among others) restored, protected, or enhanced over 115,000 acres of wetlands and other habitat. (EPA 2014)
- 1,900 river miles were cleared of over 250 barriers resulting in fish swimming into stretches of river where they have been absent for decades. (EPA 2014)
- Based on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service monitoring, GLRI-sponsored actions are increasing self-sustaining populations of native species important to the Great Lakes, like lake sturgeon. For example, efforts in the Saginaw River watershed have contributed to the now self-sustaining walleye population in Saginaw Bay, MI. (EPA 2013)

- Nearly 800,000 acres of Great Lakes agricultural land were put into USDA conservation contracts to reduce erosion and nutrient runoff into Great Lakes tributaries. (EPA 2014)

These numbers are impressive. The stories behind them, however, are more illuminating as to the types of results that we are seeing and what is being accomplished. The Coalition has documented more than 100 restoration success stories across the region.ⁱ Among them:

- At the Ashtabula River in Ohio, a sediment cleanup and habitat restoration project has restored the lower two miles of the river and advanced efforts to get it de-listed as a Great Lakes Area of Concern. The project has improved water quality and deepened the river channel, making the lower Ashtabula suitable again for maritime commerce, fishing, and recreation boating.
- The Grand Calumet River in Indiana, which flows through a heavily industrialized area south of Chicago, was for years considered America's most polluted river. Thanks to a major cleanup, a large wetland was restored and more than 575,000 cubic yards of toxic mud was removed from the Lake Michigan tributary. The restoration project addressed pollution that had led to fish consumption advisories, drinking water restrictions, beach closings, habitat destruction, and an array of other environmental problems.
- At Clear Creek in Freedom, New York, excess stream erosion and sediment, in-stream barriers, elevated water temperatures, and competition from invasive fish restricted brook trout to a few tributaries in the watershed. A Great Lakes Restoration Initiative project restored 1,200 linear feet of in-stream habitat and re-established fish passage over a sheet-pile grade control structure, reconnecting six miles of prime trout habitat.

How We Are Doing the Work

How the region is accomplishing all this work is as impressive as what we are doing. The GLRI, which President Obama first proposed in 2010, is a model for large, land-scape scale restoration. It ensures that the focus remains on the highest regional priorities that were identified through a large stakeholder process in 2005, which was initiated by President George W. Bush. The initiative itself is implementing a restoration strategy called the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes that over 1,500 people helped build. It also provides an outlet for the U.S. to meet its obligations under the new Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement with Canada. The GLRI is a critical component towards ensuring that the goals we set for ourselves in both the agreement and comprehensive plan can be achieved.

Additionally, the GLRI sought to fix problems the Government Accountability Office identified in 2003 when it complained that there was inadequate coordination among Federal agencies and between Federal and non-Federal stakeholders.ⁱⁱ Now, the EPA, working with other Federal agencies like the Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA, NRCS, and the National Park Service, can quickly convert the funding they receive to supplement restoration activities through their existing, authorized programs. This structure allows for funds to move quickly from EPA through the interagency agreements EPA reaches with the other agencies and onto the ground to complete important restoration work. This model also ensures accountability through the establishment of an "orchestra leader" (EPA), helps accelerate progress, and avoids potential duplication, all of which help save taxpayers money while focusing efforts on the highest, consensus-based priorities.ⁱⁱⁱ

Maintaining Results until the Job is Done

Unfortunately, the health of the Great Lakes continues to be seriously threatened by problems such as sewage overflows that close beaches, toxic pollution that poses a threat to the health of people and wildlife, algal blooms that harm local drinking water supplies, and invasive species that hurt fish and wildlife populations and our outdoor recreation economy. While we have cleaned up two AOCs, there are still 27 more to go. Algal blooms in Lake Erie and other lakes still result in cancelled charter boat tours and closed beaches. Communities are still dealing with legacy pollutants that have led to drinking water restrictions, beach closings, and fish consumption advisories. Our work is not done so maintaining Federal funding is needed.

Additionally, this Congress should remove all doubt that the region is on the right path and pass legislation that specifically authorizes the GLRI. Currently, EPA is using existing authorities coupled with the legislative language you provide as the statutory basis for its coordinating role. Passing legislation, such as that introduced by Rep. David Joyce and Sen. Carl Levin, creates greater certainty for the program and allows everyone to focus on getting the job done.

Lastly, EPA's Science Advisory Board noted in a 2012 report that the GLRI Action Plan supported initial Federal investments to restore the Lakes because enough was known about the problems and potential solutions to impairments in the Great Lakes to initiate action; the Action Plan identified most of the key actions needed; and the Action Plan is largely consistent with previous plans and strategies. However, the SAB's report pointed out that the GLRI needs to do better research, monitoring, and assessment. It also pointed out that the GLRI lacks a formal science-based framework for assessing progress and evaluating future priorities. We believe this science-based framework and independent science advice is critical to make Great Lakes restoration efforts as efficient and effective as possible; that the region's scientists must be engaged in producing and helping implement that plan and not just asked to react to a federally-generated adaptive management blueprint; and that EPA must use an appropriate portion of GLRI funds to implement, coordinate, and better communicate the Federal and non-Federal research, monitoring, and assessment – ongoing and required – for future success.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our views with you. The GLRI is delivering results. But more work remains. Cutting restoration funding now will only make projects harder and more expensive the longer we wait. While we are greatly encouraged by the progress we are seeing in local communities across the region, we all must keep in mind that it will take time for all of us to see lakewide environmental improvement in an ecosystem the size of the Great Lakes. We are seeing hundreds of trees but it still will take time to make them into a forest.

We also recognize the tough choices you face, but we believe that restoring the Great Lakes is not only good for the environment but also is good for the national economy as well. We hope you will maintain \$300 million for the GLRI next year.

ⁱ Found at www.healthylakes.org/successes/.

ⁱⁱ We anticipate that the GLRI Action Plan for FY2015-2019 will incorporate changes that address the concerns raised by GAO in 2013. Those concerns included, in part, recommending the initiative incorporate climate change into its goals and create metrics of success that better link the ecological change being sought to the actions being supported and undertaken.

ⁱⁱⁱ Even with quick federal action, the Great Lakes region has a shortened work season because of winter conditions. This can result in a longer time period for grantees to outlay GLRI funds rather than just the obligation of funds.