

October XX, 2016

The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Chairman
Committee on Environment & Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment & Public Works
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
2251 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
2164 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Energy and Commerce Committee
2322A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Inhofe, Shuster, and Upton and Ranking Members Boxer, DeFazio, and Pallone,

We respectfully request that the final version of the Water Resources Development Act of 2016 (WRDA) include the following priorities that are vital to the economic and ecological development of the Great Lakes region. As Senators representing the Great Lakes states, we urge you to retain several important provisions in conference to protect and improve the health and navigability of our nation's greatest fresh water resource and ensure safe drinking water for communities nationwide.

Ensuring Clean Drinking Water

The public health crisis in Flint, Michigan has shed light on the importance of maintaining and investing in our nation's water infrastructure. Title VII of the Senate WRDA bill contains fully offset funding and policies to help achieve this objective, including: emergency resources to help rebuild Flint's drinking water network; funding to respond to the public health needs stemming from lead exposure; and additional low-interest financing for water infrastructure projects through the Water Infrastructure Financing and Innovation Act program. In addition, the Senate bill funds new grant programs to reduce lead in drinking water systems nationwide, improve drinking water infrastructure in rural communities, and enhance investments in innovative clean water technologies. At the same time, the Senate bill encourages communities to develop integrated plans that result in efficient and cost-effective drinking water solutions, embrace tools to control sewer and storm water overflows, address harmful algae blooms, and perform lead

testing in schools and daycare facilities. We urge you to retain these important policies and funding from the Senate WRDA bill.

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is another critical tool to help address the impacts of water pollution for the more than 30 million Americans residing in our Great Lakes communities. The GLRI is a multi-agency initiative that focuses on the most serious issues threatening the lakes, including toxic contamination, run-off pollution, and invasive species. Projects are focused on solving regional challenges and achieving measureable results. With support from the GLRI, four U.S. Great Lakes Areas of Concern have been delisted from the binational list of toxic hotspots across the Great Lakes, 115,000 acres of wetlands and other habitat have been restored, and more than 350 dams and barriers have been removed. The restoration work supported by the GLRI in cooperation with agencies like the Army Corps of Engineers, is often a first step to reopening once hazardous navigation channels like Waukegan Harbor, Illinois, and boosting local economic development. Both the Senate-passed and House-passed WRDA bills include a five-year reauthorization of the GLRI, taken from standalone bills in the Senate (S. 1024) and House (H.R. 223).

Great Lakes Navigation System

The Great Lakes Navigation System (GLNS) is often the least expensive mode of shipping in the Midwest, keeping costs low for American consumers, creating jobs for our manufacturers, construction workers, and energy providers, and saving customers \$3.6 billion annually in freight costs. However, more than 17 million cubic yards of sediment remain to be dredged from navigation channels, and unexpected failures of our aging Great Lakes infrastructure, such as the MacArthur Lock closure experienced in 2015, threaten employment and the price of consumer goods across the nation. The Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 allocated at least 10 percent of annual “priority” Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund spending to the GLNS through 2022. Both the Senate-passed and House-passed WRDA bills make this allocation permanent to ensure the continued and consistent investment that is so critical to our region.

Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act (GLFWRA)

The Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act provides the authority necessary for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to administer projects to restore fish and wildlife resources in the Great Lakes Basin. GLFWRA supported 123 projects from 1998-2012 to restore threatened and endangered species, combat illegal fishing activities, and protect and maintain fish and wildlife habitats. The Senate-passed Water Resources Development Act of 2016 includes language taken from bipartisan standalone bills in the Senate (S. 2949) and House (H.R. 5765), that reauthorize the GLFWRA.

Waterfront Community Revitalization and Resiliency

The Senate-passed WRDA bill includes the text of S. 1935, the Waterfront Community Revitalization and Resiliency Act, which passed the Senate by unanimous consent in July. These

provisions will support communities working to make the most of their waterfronts by providing technical assistance to support revitalization and resiliency planning, which can reduce the costs of recovery from storms, expand public access to water resources, and attract development. We urge you to retain this section, which authorizes the program at \$25 million per year through 2021 and sets aside \$800,000 to launch this important work.

Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program

The Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration (GLFER) Program supports high-priority projects that contribute to the health of the Great Lakes fishery and ecosystem. Projects proposed for funding under GLFER responsibly require a non-federal partner and must be peer-reviewed through the GLFER Review Committee, a committee comprising state, federal, and tribal partners and facilitated by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. We support including provisions in the House WRDA bill that would reauthorize this important program, eliminate the outdated funding cap, and allow for 10% of GLFER funds to be used for recreational enhancements such as walking paths, fishing stations, and picnic shelters at these projects.

We urge your support of these priorities during conference to recognize the importance of the Great Lakes to our nation. As national treasures constituting 95% of the nation's surface freshwater and home to more than 3,500 species of plants and animals, the Great Lakes are the economic and ecological core of the region. The modernization of our nation's water infrastructure is critical to boosting our global economic competitiveness, ensuring safe, clean drinking water, and creating jobs.

Sincerely,