

Fall Virtual Fly-in Talking Points

November 14-18, 2022

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The Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition is a coalition of more than 170 non-governmental organizations, whose common goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes. Each year, we meet with congressional representatives to talk about what we can do to protect the drinking water for over 30 million Americans. The Coalition is hosting a virtual fly-in with members of Congress Nov. 14-18.

BACKGROUND

- 1) **Congress is operating under a temporary budget deal that needs to be resolved by December 16.** Congress failed to pass a budget for the current fiscal year (2023), which runs from October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023. Congress is instead working under a temporary budget for the fiscal year. The current budget deal expires on December 16, and the Coalition is working to ensure that the final budget contains our Great Lakes and clean water priorities.
- 2) **Congress has passed major legislation over the past year that will add billions of dollars to address many of our conservation priorities.** The enactment of the bipartisan infrastructure law last year (the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act), as well as passage of historic climate legislation over the summer (the Inflation Reduction Act), will bring billions of dollars of federal funding to states to help fix and upgrade local drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, as well as help communities prepare for, and adapt, to climate change through nature-based infrastructure, farm conservation, and other measures. **These investments will be essential to help communities enhance their resilience and meet their clean water goals; however, this funding will not fix all of the nation's inadequate water infrastructure, clean water, or climate adaptation problems.** We still have serious problems to address, which is why we need annual appropriations numbers to grow, not shrink.
- 3) **The Coalition has increasingly prioritized environmental injustice in our work.** The talking points below contain several opportunities to weave in core messages around environmental injustice. This is a starting point. We've also included, at the end of this document, messaging guidance on this topic. This guidance stems from a series of focus groups that the Coalition sponsored around environmental injustice in the fall of 2021.

The Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition's two main priorities for Congress are:

1. Provide \$400 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and funding for other Great Lakes restoration programs (see policy priorities document).
2. Fully fund drinking water and wastewater infrastructure programs and make sure that federal investments are targeting the biggest problems and the communities hardest-hit by pollution.

1. Provide \$400 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and funding for other Great Lakes restoration programs (see policy priorities document and FY23 funding chart).

MAIN MESSAGE

Federal Great Lakes restoration investments are producing results. But serious threats remain. Congress must continue supporting our communities by fully funding and reauthorizing key restoration programs to protect our drinking water, public health, jobs, and quality of life.

SECONDARY MESSAGES

- Federal investments to protect and restore the Great Lakes are delivering results in communities around the region.
 - **Provide an example in your local community if you can.**
 - **You can also refer to the Success Stories fact sheet for an example.**
 - Restoration investments, according to 2018 analysis, are creating a 3-to-1 return on investment in local communities driving new real estate/commercial development and a resurgence in water-based outdoor recreation. All boosting tourism, housing options, and home values.
 - These benefits are helping attract and retain young people to the region.
- Despite this progress, serious threats remain.
 - **Provide a local example.**
 - Toxic algal blooms continue to foul drinking water, threaten public health, and hurt the recreation economy.
 - The region is still plagued with fish consumption advisories, toxic contamination, beach closures and drinking water advisories.
- Restoration projects will only become more difficult and expensive the longer we wait.

2. Fully fund drinking water and wastewater infrastructure programs and make sure that federal investments are targeting the biggest problems, the communities hardest-hit by pollution, and those who can least afford these critical fixes.

MAIN MESSAGE

Clean water is a basic need and we should do what it takes to ensure it is available to everyone in the region. But our Great Lakes – and the over 30 million people who depend on them for drinking water – are facing many threats, from lead contamination to sewage overflows. We need to address these problems now, because the longer we wait, the harder and more expensive it will be to solve. We must upgrade our outdated drinking water and sewage treatment infrastructure, and make sure we are helping the communities hardest hit by pollution.

SECONDARY MESSAGES

- Great Lakes communities face an infrastructure crisis.

- The eight Great Lakes states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York **face more than \$188 billion in needed improvements to meet the clean water goals of people and businesses in the region.**
- Sewage contamination and leaking pipes continue to plague communities.
- Water main breaks are common.
- Lead contamination threatens the health of people in communities throughout the region, including Flint, Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland and other communities across the region.
- The influx of money from recent legislation – the bipartisan infrastructure law and climate bill – will provide much-needed investment. However, that funding will not address all of the local needs. We need congressional funding to meet authorization levels so that we are doing all we can to protect local drinking water.
- Communities are having a hard time paying for expensive repairs and upgrades.
 - **The federal investment in water infrastructure has plummeted.**
 - According to Congressional Budget Office data, federal funding for water and wastewater utilities has decreased fourfold since 1980, leaving state and local governments – and ultimately local residents -- to pick up the tab.
 - **Local communities are taking on the bulk of the cost of repairs**—and utility rates for residents have risen accordingly: **From 2010 to 2017, water rates increased 41 percent across the country.**
 - In some Great Lakes communities, water bills have doubled or tripled.
 - Boosting the federal investment in water infrastructure will help alleviate the cost burden on local communities and residents, and help with the worsening water affordability crisis.
 - The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act secured billions in new investments and increased the funding authorization for many water infrastructure programs, and we advocate for full funding of these programs.
 - Further, we advocate for more grants, as opposed to loans.
- We continue to support investments in nature-based infrastructure, in which wetlands, rain gardens, trees, bioswales and other features allow rain water to be absorbed by the natural landscape before it can flood and overwhelm traditional infrastructure.
 - These natural solutions can save money, prevent flooding, and help communities adapt to the more severe storms brought by climate change.
 - Nature-based infrastructure also provides other benefits, such as improved fish and wildlife habitat, enhanced recreational opportunities, and improved water quality.
- We want to make sure that water infrastructure investments are going to fix the biggest problems and to the communities that are most impacted by pollution.
 - We want to ensure that EPA has the capacity and staff to prioritize funds to those communities that need it the most, carry out meaningful community engagement, and offer the technical assistance that is needed to help communities impacted by pollution receive much-needed financial investment.

3. Investments in Great Lakes Restoration and Clean Water Can Help the People Most in Need

MAIN MESSAGE

Clean drinking water is a basic need. We need to ensure everyone in the U.S. has access to clean, safe, and affordable drinking water, and we need to start where the problems are biggest.

SECONDARY MESSAGES

- Clean drinking water is a basic need. But right now, too many communities in the U.S. are dealing with health-threatening pollution. For example [INSERT LOCAL EXAMPLE HERE].
- (For more moderate or liberal members): Data from the EPA says some communities—especially low-income, Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities—are more likely to be dealing with serious health threats from pollution.
- (For more conservative members): It should not matter if you are wealthy, poor, or middle class, white, black, Latino, Asian, or Indigenous—you have a right to clean water.
- We need to ensure that the communities that have been harmed the most by pollution are prioritized when it comes to cleanup.