

Great Lakes Coalition 2024 Policy Priorities

1. Invest in Great Lakes Restoration and Climate Action

Great Lakes restoration investments are producing economic and ecological results. But serious threats remain. Congress must support Great Lakes restoration programs and fully fund these efforts in FY2025 appropriations. Great Lakes restoration investments are critical to improving community resilience and protecting water quality and community health. We urge Congress:

- Reauthorize the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative**
~ **Support the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2024 (H.R. 7257/S.3738)**
- Fund Great Lakes Restoration programs at no less than:**
 - ~ *EPA's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI): \$450 million, as authorized.*
 - ~ *USFWS' Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration (GLFWRA): \$8 million*
 - ~ *Army Corps' Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration (GLFER): \$15 million*
 - ~ *U.S. FWS and USGS invasive carp programs: \$35 million and \$15 million, respectively.*

The Great Lakes region faces a web of compounding threats impacting the health of our communities. We've seen the direct result of the lack of action on climate change and an underinvestment in resilient infrastructure, as Great Lakes communities face disastrous impacts from flooding, sewage overflows, and worsening toxic algal blooms. With climate change pushing our current infrastructure past its limits, the time to act is now. We are encouraged by the progress stemming from critical investments made through the Inflation Reduction Act. We urge Congress to reject the inclusion of harmful rescissions that would slow climate action, set back restoration efforts, and harm public health in the Great Lakes and across the country:

- Reject rescissions of climate, environmental justice, and infrastructure investments passed under the Inflation Reduction Act (P.L. 117-169).**

2. Invest in Water Infrastructure

The Great Lakes region is grappling with crumbling and unsafe drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. Our communities need more than \$225 billion over 20 years to improve, upgrade, and repair drinking water and wastewater systems. This work is increasingly unaffordable with costs too often being passed on to the communities that can least afford it. Investing in our region's water infrastructure would not only protect public health but allow for important infrastructure upgrades improving the resiliency of our communities, reducing maintenance and operational costs, and creating good-paying local jobs.

Historic investments under the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act are reaching communities across the region, providing crucial supplemental funding for critical local and regional water infrastructure projects. Though, the impact of these efforts is under threat without clear congressional support for full annual funding and equitable implementation of these infrastructure programs. Congress must:

- Fund key EPA water infrastructure programs at no less than:**
 - ~ *Clean Water State Revolving Fund: \$4.9 billion*
 - ~ *Drinking Water State Revolving Fund: \$4.4 billion*
 - ~ *Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants: \$280 million*
 - ~ *Lead programs including Reducing Lead in Drinking Water and Lead Mapping Pilot programs at \$200 million and \$10 million, respectively.*
 - ~ *Small and Disadvantaged Communities Grants: \$120 million*
 - ~ *Individual Household Decentralized Wastewater Treatment System Grants: \$50 million*
 - ~ *Reject any rescissions of infrastructure investments passed under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (P.L. 117-58).*

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- Support effective and equitable implementation of water infrastructure investments:
 - ~ Maximize funding provided as grants or forgivable loans to disadvantaged communities and those most impacted by pollution.
 - ~ Increase investment in staffing at EPA program offices to ensure effective and equitable implementation of investments, enhance community engagement, and increase technical assistance capacity to states and disadvantaged communities.

3. Restore and Strengthen Clean Water Protections

Too many cities and towns are living with unsafe water, and we need to do more to protect our Lakes, waterways, and drinking water sources. Legacy pollutants persist, lead pipes contaminate drinking water, PFAS threatens human and environmental health, climate change is overwhelming aging infrastructure, and rollbacks to federal regulations have weakened clean water protections. Congress must support efforts to strengthen Clean Water Act protections for our waters and wetlands, safeguard our communities and the environment, and make addressing these regional and national issues a priority:

- Protect EPA's and USACE's Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rulemaking, supporting efforts to critically reinstate longstanding Clean Water Act protections for wetlands and waterways that safeguard downstream communities and the environment that have lost protected status.
- Support the establishment of drinking water standards for toxic PFAS, ensuring dischargers are subject to limits under the Clean Water Act and fund remediation.
- Support the establishment of discharge standards for plastic pollution, advancing producer responsibility policies to reduce plastic waste, cleanup, and fund research on public and environmental health impacts.
- Direct EPA to exercise its responsibility under the Clean Water Act to establish numeric water pollution standards for nutrients and other pollutants driving toxic algal blooms.

4. Pass a Clean Water Farm Bill

The Great Lakes region is a major agricultural center, essential to our country's food system. However, the land and water use practices promoted by this agricultural system have come at a great cost to water quality and public health. The Farm Bill is a critical opportunity for Congress to advance legislation that will protect the Great Lakes, enhance water quality across the watershed, address the threat of toxic algal blooms, invest in community development, infrastructure, and public health, and support the implementation of sustainable farming practices. Congress must:

- Increase Farm Bill Conservation Funding, ensuring NRCS and programs such as RCPP, EQIP, CSP, and CRP are funded and staffed to support the training, research, monitoring, and implementation of sustainable conservation practices.
- Reject proposed rescissions for supplemental funds for conservation and climate smart agriculture programs passed under the Inflation Reduction Act (P.L. 117-169).
- Require the development of water-quality based standards to reduce agricultural runoff, tying payments through conservation and other major assistance programs to the implementation of agricultural best practices for clean water outcomes.
- Reform the Federal Crop Insurance Program by providing incentives and program support for the implementation of soil health practices, diversified and regenerative agriculture, and establishing conservation planning and compliance as a requirement for qualification.



Since 2004, the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition has been harnessing the collective power of more than 185 groups representing millions of people, whose common goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes. Learn more at HealthyLakes.org or follow us on Twitter, Facebook, Bluesky, Mastodon, and Threads [@HealthyLakes](https://twitter.com/HealthyLakes).

CONTACT US. WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

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