



May 15, 2023

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Matt Cartwright
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Rogers and Ranking Member Cartwright:

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 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. We are grateful for the much needed support the region has received in recent years, critically supplemented by funds provided under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58). We are seeing on-the-ground results because of the investments in communities across Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. 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 or allows the recent supplemental funds to supplant regular annual appropriations.

First, we ask you to support Great Lakes science and restoration by providing robust funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), ensuring full funding for critical programs and enhancing the agency's staffing capacity. NOAA is an important federal partner in our region through its habitat restoration efforts under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), toxic algal bloom research and forecasting, marine debris monitoring, and investments in community and coastal resilience. Its leadership and partnership are essential, without which our Great Lakes restoration and protection efforts would fall short of our communities' needs and goals.

These critical programs include the Great Lakes Environmental Research Lab, operated by NOAA. The lab conducts innovative research on the dynamic environments and ecosystems of the region's water system that is critical in informing the restoration and management of safe and sustainable ecosystems, ecosystem services, and communities. Its investigations have included analyses of the food web changes since the Zebra and Quagga mussel invasion, the impacts of climate change, the development of coastal forecast systems, and toxic algal bloom forecasting. We urge the subcommittee to continue supporting this work by designating no less than \$40.5 million in funding for the agency's Laboratories and Cooperative Institutes. We also support no less than \$80.5 million for the Integrated Ocean Observing System Regional

Observations, which includes the Great Lakes Observing System. As part of a vast network, the system is a core component of the information infrastructure critical to safe navigation across the Lakes and responding to toxic spills, storms, and other coastal hazards.

Second, the growing threat of toxic algal blooms is of great concern to the region. New blooms are being fueled by excessive amounts of phosphorus washing into the lakes from urban and agricultural runoff. Moreover, stronger storms driven by climate change and the ecosystem impact of invasive mussels contribute to the problem. These harmful algal blooms close beaches, kill fish, impact local drinking water supplies (like Toledo, Ohio, in 2014), and when water supplies are contaminated, the most vulnerable members of the community are the first to be impacted. The Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act program empowers NOAA to work collaboratively with research partners to engage with this threat in the Great Lakes. Research seeks to use an integrated approach to understand the ecosystem dynamics and environmental drivers of these blooms to improve prediction and mitigation strategies. Harmful algal blooms are spreading farther and faster and beginning earlier than ever before and we must act to protect communities from this growing threat. We urge Congress to fund NOAA's activities by providing at least \$42 million for Competitive Research grants.

Third, we also urge Congress to continue supporting the other programs and partnerships that collaboratively support and enhance regional and nationwide resilience and restoration efforts. These include the:

- Sanctuaries and Marine Protected Areas program which underpins Great Lakes protection through a web of marine protected areas, including the Thunder Bay and Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuaries. We urge Congress provide no less than \$95.5 million for the program.
- Sea Grant College program provides for a federal partnership with academic and research institutions to educate and inform the public on maintaining resilient communities and economies, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, healthy coastal ecosystems, and promoting environmental literacy and workforce development. We support no less than \$140 million for the program.
- Coastal Zone Management Grants which are critical in supporting the participation of underfunded state agencies in the Coastal Zone Management Program that brings about coordination between state and federal regulators for the restoration and responsible development of our coastal communities and resources We urge Congress appropriate no less than \$132 million for the grant program.
- National Oceans and Coastal Security Fund which provides grants for the expansion and restoration of natural systems in areas that will both increase protection for communities from coastal storms, lake-level changes, flooding, and coastal erosion while improving critical fish and wildlife habitats. We urge Congress appropriate no less than \$40 million for the grant program.
- Marine Debris Program that coordinates regional efforts for the prevention, research, monitoring, emergency response, and removal of debris, an effort that benefits coastal habitats, wildlife, and protects the public who use our region's waterways. We support no less than \$20 million for the program.

Fourth, we ask the Committee to support the efforts of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). NOAA is one of the critical contributing partners to the GLRI, an agency that is supplemented and enhanced by the GLRI and provides critical research capacity for the Great Lakes Region. The initiative is improving the lives of millions of people and has seen efforts undertaken or completed on more than 7,300 restoration projects throughout the region. Projects that are benefiting communities by cleaning up waters that are the drinking source for millions of homes and thousands of industries.

Investments in Great Lakes restoration create jobs and lead 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.

Still much work needs to be done. A changing climate, habitat loss, invasive species, and toxic pollutants threaten the region, endangering wildlife and public health, lowering property values, and hurting the region's economy. Threats that all too often disproportionately impact communities 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. We urge the Subcommittee fully fund NOAA and its critical Great Lakes restoration, community resilience, and climate science programs in the Fiscal Year 2024 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

As the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans and the heart of our regional economy, the Great Lakes region needs the nation's protection and restoration. The region stands ready to continue this important federal partnership, ensuring that all benefit from and enjoy these investments in restoration and protection. 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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