



May 15, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Fleischmann
Chair

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Marcy Kaptur
Ranking Member

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Fleischmann and Ranking Member Kaptur:

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 Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. We are grateful for the much needed support the region has received in recent years. Federal investments to restore the lakes and protect our drinking water are producing on-the-ground results 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 more expensive to solve.

First, we urge Congress continue its support for Great Lakes restoration and protection by funding and authorizing agencies and actions that protect our waters and the communities that rely on them. The Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) provides essential research, technical expertise, and construction capability to undertake the region's major restoration efforts. It is essential the Subcommittee provide robust funding for the Corps implementation of resilient natural infrastructure solutions, supporting its Engineering with Nature Initiative, and enhancing its community engagement capacity, ensuring the Corps incorporates consideration of environmental justice in every aspect of its work. Recognizing the historic health and environmental inequities many have faced, and ensuring we begin to address these disproportionate impacts, are important steps in protecting our most vulnerable communities and ensuring the benefits of Great Lakes restoration and community resilience projects are enjoyed by all.

Second, soil erosion and runoff from farms, forests, and urban areas continues to impact water quality, increasing risk and prevalence of harmful algal blooms, and decreasing the depths of navigation channels. The Corps can be a critical partner to help address these threats and contribute to the economic and sustainable future of the region. Programs like the Great Lakes Tributary Model develop and provide free access to an array of computer models and web-based tools that help state and local agencies and non-governmental groups evaluate the impacts of soil

conservation and non-point source pollution control. This is in addition to providing free training programs and web-based tools that can be used to evaluate soil erosion and sediment delivery anywhere in the Great Lakes watershed. These services are important to Great Lakes restoration efforts, and we urge Congress to continue supporting this program at \$600,000 in the new fiscal year.

Other critical restoration and research programs include the Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study (GLCRS) and the Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program. The GLCRS is a regional initiative in which the Corps, in collaboration with NOAA, USGS, FEMA and EPA, investigate opportunities to improve resilience within both the built and natural coastal environments, aiming to identify areas that are vulnerable to flooding and recommend measures to increase resilience and protect communities. The Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program engages in the planning, design, and construction of projects that restore ecosystems across the Great Lakes watershed. Projects executed under this program (in collaboration with cost-sharing non-federal partners) include the restoration of wetlands and aquatic habitat on public lands, dam removal to re-establish free flowing rivers, improving fish passages, spawning and nursery habitat, and restoration of coastal habitat. We urge Congress to fund these previously unfunded initiatives at \$3 million and \$15 million respectively.

Third, the ongoing environmental and economic damage caused by aquatic invasive species, as well as potential future harm from new invaders, like invasive carp, is real and persistent in our region. To keep invasive carp out of the Great Lakes, we ask Congress to fully fund all actions taken as part of the Invasive Carp Action Plan, adjusted to reflect the Asian carp threat and agency need. The Corps is at the forefront of these efforts engaging federal and local partners on critical construction projects in defense of the spread of these invasive species. We ask the subcommittee to continue their support for the Brandon Road Lock and Dam project and approve the requested \$200,000 in funding for the GLMRIS study. The establishment of invasive carp in the Great Lakes would devastate a \$7 billion fisheries industry and would undermine the outdoor recreation economy.

We also urge Congress to continue funding existing actions to deter invasive species. The Chicago Sanitary Ship Canal Barrier is a system of electric barriers that protects the only known continuous connection between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins from the risk of transfer of invasive species. Operated to deter the inter-basin establishment of invasive carp and other invasive fish, the barriers are one control technology in a broad interagency invasive carp prevention effort. Ensuring its efficacy and continued operation is critical, and we urge Congress to provide at least \$13.75 million for the Corps' continued efforts.

Fourth, we ask the Committee to support the efforts of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). The Corps is a critical partner to this effort, providing essential capacity and expertise for the remediation of toxic hotspots and enhancing habitat restoration efforts. The initiative is improving the lives of millions of people and has supported over 7,300 restoration projects throughout the region. Projects 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 Great Lakes states and the country. It is estimated that 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 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. Aging sewers, invasive species, and toxic pollutants threaten the region, endangering wildlife and public health, lowering property values, and hurting the region's economy. Moreover, emerging contaminants and a changing climate continue to exacerbate challenges, such as flooding and runoff pollution— many of which disproportionately impact people 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.

The Great Lakes are the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans and the heart of our regional economy. The nation cannot afford to stop protecting and restoring the Great Lakes. The region stands ready to continue this important federal partnership, ensuring that all people can 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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68

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