

**Testimony by Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition to the
House Committee on Appropriations' Subcommittee on the Department of the Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies Regarding the
Department of the Interior and Environment Appropriations Act, 2020**

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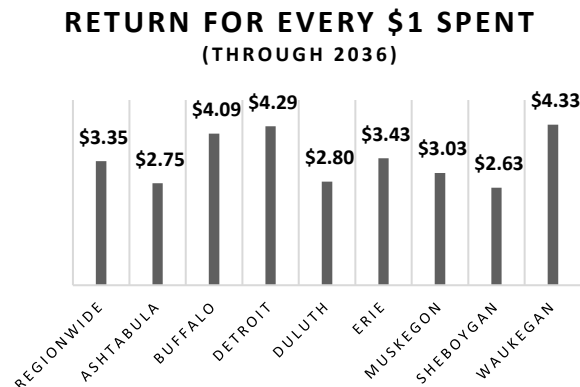
Members of the subcommittee. It is an honor to provide this testimony about one of our world's most prized natural and economic treasures – our Great Lakes. I am here on behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition. The HOW Coalition joins our regional partners in asking you to support funding for the Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and other Great Lakes restoration priorities in fiscal year 2020.

Since 2004, the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition has been harnessing the collective power of more than 150 groups representing millions of people, whose common goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

Madame Chairwoman, Mr. Ranking Member, members of the subcommittee: You have long recognized how important the Great Lakes are to our region and our nation. Over 30 million Americans rely on the Great Lakes for their drinking water, and our entire country benefits from the commerce that depends on these waters. Protecting and restoring them is a non-partisan priority for the people in the eight-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. We see the federal government as a partner in our shared endeavor to help heal the lakes through our undertaking of one of the world's largest freshwater ecosystem restoration projects. Non-governmental groups, industries, businesses, cities, and states are forging partnerships to clean up toxic hot spots, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and combat invasive species because we know we have more work to do before Great Lakes restoration is complete.

Environmental and Economic Benefits

We do this work because cleaning up the Great Lakes is critical for the health and quality of life of the region and nation. It drives economic development – and jobs – in communities all around the region, which supports the broader U.S. economy. A report last fall from economists at the University of Michigan, Central Michigan University, and Duke University demonstrated that the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative's (GLRI) ecological investments are resulting in significant economic benefits. The study showed that for every \$1 the GLRI invested through 2016 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 through 2036 (more in some cities-see chart). This new research demonstrated that the GLRI is creating new real estate and commercial



development--particularly in waterfront areas. This development has resulted in a resurgence in water-based, outdoor recreation and increasing tourism across the region, increasing housing options and home values, and an increasing number of young people staying in or relocating to Great Lakes communities. In addition, this research showed that restoration investments created or supported jobs. GLRI projects through 2016 are responsible for more than 9 percent total job growth in Ashtabula County, Ohio; 4.2 percent total job growth in Duluth, Minn.; and 3.2 percent total job growth in Sheboygan, Wis. Specific examples include:

- Twenty-seven new businesses opened to serve growing numbers of waterfront visitors in Ashtabula, Ohio, since 2010.
- Buffalo, N.Y. opened a multi-million-dollar entertainment complex in 2015 on an old industrial site, offering a restaurant, ziplining, a climbing wall, kayak and paddleboard rentals, a hockey rink, and roller derby facilities.
- Business at Detroit Outpost (a kayak outfitter and tour company) has increased 500 percent since 2013 and business at Detroit River Sports has doubled since 2015.
- Bay Marine Chicago Yachting Center opened in Waukegan, Ill. in 2018. The \$5-million development serves pleasure boaters.

These economic outcomes are possible because of restoration successes like these:

- Four Areas of Concern have been delisted (one prior to the GLRI) and as of May 2018 an additional eight have completed all management actions necessary to delist.
- Between 2010 through 2017, 73 beneficial use impairments (BUIs) have been removed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, more than six times the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years. BUIs are the benchmarks of environmental harm and characterize AOCs.
- Additional early detection and monitoring exercises and vital support for the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee prepared the region to respond to new and existing aquatic invasive species, while federal agencies and partners funded work to protect over 18,000 acres from terrestrial invasive species. Since the GLRI's inception more than 134,000 acres have been protected or treated.
- Combined with other funding, farmers implemented conservation action on more than 750,000 acres of rural lands through 2017 to reduce erosion and farm runoff that feeds toxic algal outbreaks. GLRI's supplemental funding helped double farmland under conservation around Western Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay, and Green Bay, reducing projected phosphorus runoff by nearly 770,000 pounds.
- Habitat and wildlife connectivity continued to improve as the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration worked with partners to restore, protect, or enhance over 200,000 acres of wetlands and other habitat. 4,967 river miles have also been cleared of dams and barriers resulting in fish swimming into stretches of river where they have been absent for decades.

While these numbers are impressive, the stories behind them are more illuminating:

- At the Ashtabula River in Ohio, a sediment cleanup and habitat restoration project has restored the lower two miles of the river and advanced efforts to get it de-listed as a Great Lakes Area of Concern. The project has improved water quality and deepened the river channel, making the lower Ashtabula suitable again for maritime commerce, fishing, and recreational boating.
- The iconic Two-Hearted River in Michigan has seen increased opportunities for recreation and fishing thanks to restoration that stabilized the riverbanks. In addition, 23 road crossings over the river were repaired and culverts were replaced. The combination of this work connected 35 miles of river and reduced sediment pollution by more than 625 tons per year.
- In Duluth, Minn., a conservation corps project has improved stream health and habitat while providing jobs for 14 unemployed or underemployed Duluth residents. The Stream Corps project worked with 175 landowners to plant more than 18,000 trees and shrubs, which improved water quality as well as property values.
- North Point Marina Beach in the Chicagoland area is safe for residents to swim at once more, thanks to an increase in native plants. In 2007, prior to restoration, the beach was closed for 82 percent of the swimming season due to bacteria build up from gulls. By planting the expansive beach with native plants and grasses the ecosystem is no longer hospitable to the gulls and bacterial pollution has decreased.

These stories and more can be found at www.healthylakes.org/SuccessStories

Building on a Solid Base

How the region is accomplishing all this work is as impressive as what we are doing. The GLRI is a model for large, landscape-scale restoration. It ensures that the focus remains on the highest regional priorities that are identified by stakeholders through the GLRI Action Plans, which are themselves based on a larger restoration strategy called the “Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes.” It also provides a way for the U.S. to meet its commitments under the 2012 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement with Canada. The GLRI is a critical component towards ensuring that the goals we set for ourselves in both the agreement and in this comprehensive plan can be achieved.

Additionally, the way the GLRI works is also effectively allowing federal agencies to obligate their GLRI funds quickly to on-the-ground work. The EPA, working with other Federal agencies like the FWS, NOAA, NRCS, and NPS, quickly convert the funding they receive to supplement restoration activities through existing, authorized programs. This structure allows for funds to move quickly from EPA through the interagency agreements EPA reaches with the other federal agencies and onto the ground to complete important restoration work. This model also ensures accountability through the establishment of an “orchestra leader” (EPA), helps accelerate progress, and avoids potential duplication, all of which help save taxpayers money while focusing efforts on the highest, consensus-based priorities.

This model, however, works best when both existing federal agencies and programs, as well as the GLRI, have the funding they need to support each other.

Maintaining Support Until the Job is Done

Even with the tremendous results we are seeing, the Great Lakes still face serious threats. Nineteen U.S. AOCs are still contaminated with toxic sediment, threatening the health of people and stunting the development of communities. Harmful runoff from farm fields continues to pollute our waters, causing toxic algae outbreaks that threaten water systems, public health, and

economic vitality. Habitat loss and aquatic invasive species continue to damage our region's outdoor way of life. And communities across the Great Lakes region continue to grapple with crumbling, antiquated drinking water and wastewater infrastructure and are faced with a staggering \$179 billion over the next 20 years for needed improvements, upgrades, and repairs in the eight-state region. Many of these threats disproportionately impact people that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice underscoring an urgency to address these issues for everyone in the region. Our changing climate is exacerbating all our region's challenges.

We have solutions to these problems. Congress must continue to fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and other fundamental restoration programs that produce results. Congressional investments can help communities replace lead pipes, address emerging contaminants like PFAS, end polluted stormwater runoff, and keep water affordable and safe for everyone. Congress must support action to stop Asian carp and other aquatic invasive species from invading the Great Lakes. Congress must support mitigating the damage from climate pollution to help the Great Lakes adapt to a changing climate. We also need strong clean water protections, as well as institutions that are adequately staffed and funded to enforce protections that we all depend on.

And the region is ready for these investments. With additional GLRI funds, 10 contaminated sediment cleanup projects – in the Detroit River (Mich.), St. Louis River (Minn.), Niagara River (N.Y.), Cuyahoga River (Ohio), and Milwaukee River (Wis.) – are ready to break ground in 2020. These projects are expected to require \$88 million in federal funding under the Great Lakes Legacy Act (funded through the GLRI), with another \$59 million to be provided by non-federal partners. Numerous other site investigations are underway to prepare for cleanup projects in coming years. Without GLRI funds, some of Minnesota's \$25 million in bonding money, for example, could be left on the table.

Conclusion

There is work to be done, and to keep restoration on track, we recommend support for the following Great Lakes programs under the subcommittee's jurisdiction: at least \$300 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative; \$8 million for the Fish and Wildlife Service's Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Program; \$17.5 million for the U.S. Geological Survey's Great Lakes Science Center (as would be authorized by H.R. 1023, the Great Lakes Fishery Research Authorization Act); \$11 million for Asian carp prevention undertaken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and \$8 million for the U.S.G.S. to continue making progress on Asian carp research. We also support funding for the new Great Lakes and Lake Champlain Invasive Species Monitoring program created last year by the Frank LoBiondo Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-282). We also urge the subcommittee to maintain funding for national programs like EPA's Sec. 106 and 319 programs and triple the funding for EPA's Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds.

The GLRI and other Great Lakes restoration investments are producing results. But serious threats remain. Cutting restoration funding now will only make projects harder and more expensive the longer we wait. Thank you again for your support and the opportunity to share our views with you.