

GREAT LAKES INDIAN FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION

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www.glifwc.org



• MEMBER TRIBES •

MICHIGAN

Bay Mills Community
Keweenaw Bay Community
Lac Vieux Desert Band

WISCONSIN

Bad River Band
Lac Courte Oreilles Band
Lac du Flambeau Band
Red Cliff Band
St. Croix Chippewa
Sokaogon Chippewa

MINNESOTA

Fond du Lac Band
Mille Lacs Band

FY 2027 TESTIMONY – BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES

JASON SCHLENDER, EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATOR

GREAT LAKES INDIAN FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION (GLIFWC)

1. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS, OPERATION OF INDIAN PROGRAMS

- a. **TRUST-NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, RIGHTS PROTECTION IMPLEMENTATION (RPI)** No less than **\$66,000,000** for FY 2027, the amount calculated by the five intertribal commissions to meet their basic needs. Of that amount, no less than **17.71%**¹ to be directed to **Great Lakes Area Resource Management**. Regardless of overall RPI funding, GLIFWC has identified a need of at least **\$8,927,000** to be directed through Great Lakes Area Resource Management.
- b. **TRUST-NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, TRIBAL MANAGEMENT/DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (TM/DP):** At least the **\$19,044,000** enacted by Congress for FY 2026 and the TM/DP requests of GLIFWC's member tribes.
- c. **TRUST-NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, FISH/WILDLIFE/PARKS PROGRAM:** At least **\$23,751,000**, the amount enacted Congress for FY 2026.

Funding Authorizations: Snyder Act, 25 U.S.C. s. 13; Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, (P.L. 93-638), 25 U.S.C. ss. 450f and 450h; and the treaties between the United States and GLIFWC's member Ojibwe Tribes.²

2. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

- a. **ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS AND MANAGEMENT, GEOGRAPHIC PROGRAMS, GREAT LAKES RESTORATION:** At least **\$369,000,000**, including no less than **7%** to the Distinct Tribal Program (DTP), which is approximately **\$25,000,000**.

Funding Authorizations: Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. s. 1268(c); Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, Pub. L. 114-322 s. 5005; and treaties cited above.

These programs fulfill federal treaty, trust, and contract obligations to GLIFWC's member tribes, providing vital resources to sustain their governmental programs. We ask that Congress maintain and enhance these programs.

¹ This sub-account historically received approximately 17.71% of overall RPI funding. Because recent directed spending within RPI has inadvertently reduced its proportion, GLIFWC is asking that it be restored.

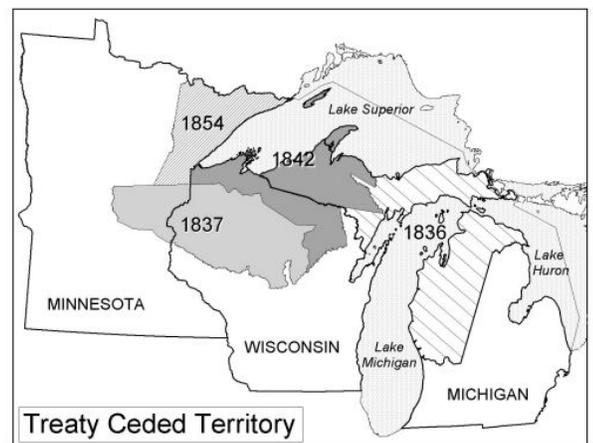
² Specifically, the Treaty of 1836, 7 Stat. 491; Treaty of 1837, 7 Stat. 536; Treaty of 1842, 7 Stat. 591; and Treaty of 1854, 10 Stat. 1109. The rights guaranteed by these treaties have been affirmed by various court decisions, including a 1999 US Supreme Court case.

GLIFWC's FY 2027 FUNDING REQUEST HIGHLIGHTS

1. Should Congress provide at least \$8,927,000 to Great Lakes Area Resource Management within RPI, GLIFWC would adjust its outdated wage scale to match the FY26 federal scale and offer a locality adjustment equal to that provided to federal employees that are stationed in the same location. This funding will increase GLIFWC's competitiveness in recruiting and retaining highly qualified employees.
2. Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding of no less than \$369,000,000, as provided in FY 2026, with an increase to the Distinct Tribal Program (DTP) to at least 7%, or approximately \$25,000,000.
3. Full funding for contract support costs, as required by the ISDEA Act.
4. Sufficient funding in the Tribal Management and Development line item for GLIFWC's member tribes to fulfill their needs for reservation-based natural resource programs and to fund the Circle of Flight wetlands program.

GLIFWC's GOAL – A SECURE FUNDING BASE TO FULFILL TREATY PURPOSES AND LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

For nearly 40 years, Congress has funded GLIFWC, a federally recognized governmental institution, to implement comprehensive conservation, natural resource protection, and law enforcement programs that: 1) ensure compliance with federal court orders that provide the framework within which member tribes exercise their treaty reserved rights to hunt, fish, and gather throughout the ceded territories; 2) enforce violations of the tribes' ceded territory regulations and protect public safety; 3) ensure a healthy and sustainable natural resource base to support those rights; and 4) promote healthy, safe communities. These programs also provide a wide range of public benefits, and facilitate participation in management partnerships in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota.



Established in 1984, GLIFWC is a natural resources management agency of eleven member Ojibwe Tribes with resource management responsibilities over their ceded territory (off-reservation) hunting, fishing, and gathering treaty rights. GLIFWC's core service area extends over a 47,000 square mile area in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan.³ GLIFWC employs over 70 full-time staff, including natural resource scientists, technicians, conservation enforcement officers, policy specialists, and public information specialists.

The RPI line item supports the federal government's implementation of its treaty obligations, and this line item allows funding to efficiently reach the most local level of government with minimal staff time and layers of bureaucracy. The intertribal commissions use this funding to ensure the

³ GLIFWC's programs do not duplicate those of the Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority or the 1854 Treaty Authority. GLIFWC also coordinates with its member tribes with respect to tribal treaty fishing that extends beyond reservation boundaries by virtue of the Treaty of 1854 and the reservations' locations on Lake Superior.

fulfillment of federal court orders. The RPI line item provides an efficient, accountable, cost-effective mechanism to ensure that tribes are in compliance with these legal mandates. We urge the Subcommittee to continue to support the RPI line item at the level needed to fulfill the intertribal commissions' needs, with 17.71% directed to Great Lakes Area Resource Management.

GLIFWC implements the treaty obligations of its member tribes through the employment of highly trained scientific, policy, enforcement, and outreach staff. While this Subcommittee, and Congress as a whole, has long supported GLIFWC's mission, the last several years of appropriations through Continuing Resolutions has led to mostly stagnant funding within the RPI line item. Because RPI funds comprise approximately 70% of the Commission's base funding, and is used to leverage other funding opportunities, this practice has made GLIFWC particularly vulnerable to inflation and cost-of-living pressures. GLIFWC would require an additional \$1,364,901 over current funding to maintain the buying power it held in FY18, and, while this Subcommittee generously allowed for an adjustment to its pay scale in FY 23, GLIFWC has since been unable to keep abreast of the federal pay scale.

For example, using the current FY23 federal pay scale, GLIFWC's wardens are paid approximately \$5,000 less per year than their federal counterparts, but approximately \$10,000 less per year once a locality adjustment is included. From the FY 23 pay adjustment until this year, this would amount to a total of \$46,000 in lost wages. Recognizing that the recruitment and retention of qualified law enforcement is a struggle nationwide, the difficulties are compounded for GLIFWC because of the existence of such a significant gap in pay.

GLIFWC's offices are located in a rural location in far northern Wisconsin. GLIFWC staff undertake water quality monitoring; wildlife and fish assessments; and legal enforcement patrols throughout approximately 47,000 square miles of the Ceded Territories. The highly trained staff required to undertake these activities often need to relocate to the area, and existing staff are required to travel long distances to fulfill their duties. By making pay competitive with other natural resource agencies, GLIFWC becomes more competitive in recruiting the appropriate staff.

These difficulties become even more apparent when considering GLIFWC's warden staff. When fully staffed, GLIFWC employs twenty full-time wardens. Nineteen of these wardens would each be responsible for coordinating enforcement activities across approximately 1,950 square miles of the inland portion of the Ceded Territories, with one warden assigned full time to Lake Superior patrols. Unfortunately, GLIFWC has had difficulty recruiting wardens for several years and its current wardens must each be responsible for coordinating enforcement activities across approximately 2,646 square miles. By recruiting and retaining five additional wardens, each area of responsibility would be more than 500 square miles smaller, allowing wardens time for increased community engagement, youth camps, and other activities that are an important part of GLIFWC's community policing initiatives. These initiatives strengthen communities and support the continuation of important cultural and subsistence practices.

The United States Forest Service, the United States Geological Survey, and other federal agencies are continuing to face cuts that will shrink their ability to be true partners in resource management throughout the Ceded Territories. Inflation and cuts to governmental assistance programs have already increased reliance on subsistence harvests and the demand for treaty

resources is likely to continue to increase. This will put more pressure on GLIFWC's staff to provide adequate monitoring of natural resource populations, enforcement of tribal self-regulatory systems, appropriate and timely consumption advice related to chemical contaminants, and coordination with state and federal resource managers and partners.

GLIFWC also supports continued funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) as an important non-regulatory program that enhances and ensures coordinated, and therefore efficient, governance in the Great Lakes, fulfillment of international agreements, and substantive natural resource protection and restoration projects. GLIFWC also supports the GLRI's Distinct Tribal Program ("DTP"). The interagency transfer of funds for the DTP facilitates the effective and efficient contracting of these monies with tribal governments and tribal institutions. The distribution of funds to the BIA's Midwest Regional Office through EPA Region 5 allows GLRI DTP funding to reach tribes efficiently through already-existing contracting mechanisms, again requiring only minimal staff time and bureaucracy.

RESULTS AND BENEFITS OF GLIFWC'S PROGRAMS

- 1. MAINTAIN THE REQUISITE CAPABILITY TO MEET LEGAL OBLIGATIONS AND TO REGULATE TREATY HARVESTS:** At its most basic level, GLIFWC's programs support tribal compliance with court decrees and intergovernmental agreements that govern the tribes' treaty-reserved rights. Funding for science and research enhances GLIFWC's ability to understand changes to ecosystems that impact treaty natural resources. Healthy natural resources benefit all who live or recreate in the Ceded Territories.
- 2. REMAIN A TRUSTED MANAGEMENT AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNER AND SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTOR IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION:** GLIFWC has become a respected and integral part of management and law enforcement partnerships that conserve natural resources and protect public safety. It brings a tribal perspective to interjurisdictional Great Lakes management forums and would use its expertise to study issues and geographic areas that are important to its member tribes but that others may not be examining.
- 3. MAINTAIN THE OVERALL PUBLIC BENEFITS THAT DERIVE FROM ITS PROGRAMS:** Over the years, GLIFWC has become a recognized and valued partner in natural resource management. Because of its institutional experience and staff expertise, GLIFWC has built and maintained numerous partnerships that: i) provide accurate information and data to counter social misconceptions about tribal treaty harvests and the status of ceded territory natural resources; ii) maximize each partner's financial resources and avoid duplication of effort and costs; iii) engender cooperation rather than competition; and iv) undertake projects that achieve public benefits that no one partner could accomplish alone.
- 4. ENCOURAGE AND CONTRIBUTE TO HEALTHY TRIBAL COMMUNITIES.** GLIFWC works with its member tribes' communities to promote the benefits of treaty rights exercise. These include the health benefits associated with a more traditional diet and the intergenerational learning that takes place when elders teach youth. In addition, GLIFWC sponsors a camp each summer where tribal youth build leadership skills, strengthen connections to the outdoors, and learn about treaty rights and careers in natural resource fields.