



## Great Lakes Restoration Initiative: Strategically Targeting Critical Great Lakes Problems

A variety of factors continue to impair the health of the Great Lakes and undermine the economic benefits they provide to the region. Fortunately, we have a plan in place to address these challenges. In 2004 the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) was established to develop a comprehensive restoration strategy for the lakes. A coalition of more than 1,500 federal, state and local officials and interested stakeholders developed this restoration blueprint that established key goals and required actions for restoring and protecting the Great Lakes. Unfortunately, federal funding to implement the GLRC strategy has been woefully inadequate.

That changed in 2009 when President Obama proposed – and Congress approved funding for – the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), an unprecedented, multi-year program to restore the Great Lakes. The GLRI will help implement the comprehensive GLRC restoration plan, which projected a cost of \$20 billion over five years for cleaning up the Great Lakes. If fully funded over its five-year timeframe, the GLRI, coupled with other critical programs, will help fulfill the promise of the GLRC strategy and accelerate on-the-ground action to restore the Great Lakes.



Sand dunes on Lake Michigan,  
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**Request:** The Great Lakes Commission calls on Congress to maintain or increase funding for the GLRI from the FY 2010 level of \$475 million. Additional congressional action is needed to reauthorize U.S. EPA's Great Lakes Program and formally authorize the GLRI, including strong roles for states and stakeholders.

### Strategically Targeting Great Lakes Problems

The GLRI will strategically complement existing federal programs and strengthen collaboration with state, local and nongovernmental partners. It is directed at solving urgent problems facing the Great Lakes by

- Shutting the door on aquatic invasive species
- Cleaning up contaminated sediments under the Great Lakes Legacy Act
- Controlling polluted runoff and cleaning up beach pollution
- Restoring degraded wetlands, and
- Conserving and enhancing valuable fish and wildlife resources

The first year's funding of \$475 million for the GLRI is a solid down payment on the President's \$5 billion commitment to the Great Lakes. With the GLRI now underway, increased funding is needed to support large-scale restoration projects and to meet the President's \$5 billion commitment.

The GLRI is being led by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and coordinated through the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, which is improving coordination of federal programs. The Initiative leverages contributions and expertise from state, local and nongovernmental partners. It is guided by a five-year action plan that sets outcome-oriented performance goals, criteria for measuring progress, and clear standards of accountability. The GLRI will also engage an independent scientific review panel to ensure the best available science is used to guide Great Lakes restoration efforts. Congress was clear in FY 2010 that the GLRI is intended to supplement, but not supplant, base funding for federal programs that support ongoing management and conservation of the lakes. With funding for the Initiative's first year, the Great Lakes region is taking a significant step toward a cleaner environment and a healthier economy.

## Progress to Date

**Funding on-the-ground activities:** In FY 2010, \$475 million was provided for the GLRI. This funding is currently being distributed by U.S. EPA through both its own programs and those of other federal agencies. A substantial portion of the funding is being administered to nonfederal partners via grants, cooperative agreements and contracts. Agencies including the U.S. EPA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA have issued funding opportunities and the work has already begun.

**Engaging stakeholders:** In July 2009, U.S. EPA released a draft Great Lakes Multi-Year Restoration Action Plan Outline to guide implementation of the GLRI over a five-year timeframe (FY 2010-2014). In July and August the agency convened a series of meetings across the Great Lakes basin to review the GLRI and secure feedback on the draft Action Plan Outline. Separate meetings were held in each state for the public and state agencies, and regional conference calls were held for Great Lakes tribes and cities. The meetings were attended by more than 1,000 participants, engaging the Great Lakes states, cities, tribes and other stakeholders. The U.S. EPA released a new draft of the Action Plan in December.

**Ensuring clear accountability:** The U.S. EPA has developed an internet-based accountability system to track and report on progress in achieving objectives in the action plan. Entities receiving GLRI funds will be required to enter basic data about their projects such as location, funding, projected outcomes, and relationship to the GLRI Action Plan.

**Coordinating federal programs and applying sound science:** The GLRI is being led by the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, which includes 11 federal agencies and departments. With leadership from U.S. EPA, the Task Force is coordinating contributions from federal programs and resources being directed at Great Lakes restoration. In addition, U.S. EPA will establish an independent scientific review panel to ensure the best available science is used to guide Great Lakes restoration efforts.

## Economic and Environmental Benefits

The Great Lakes are an extraordinary natural resource for the region and the nation. They provide important benefits to more than 32 million Americans who live in the region, including transportation for raw materials and finished goods; fresh water for industries; drinking water for communities; recreation for citizens; and a vibrant ecosystem for diverse communities of plants and animals. The Great Lakes are both a valuable natural resource and a vital component of our region's economic infrastructure. In these tough economic times it is imperative that we maximize the value of the Great Lakes. Doing so will create jobs, stimulate economic development and invest in freshwater resources that will be central to the future of the eight-state Great Lakes region.

In 2007 The Brookings Institution documented the value of economic benefits to be gained if the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy recommendations were implemented. The report, *Healthy Waters, Strong Economy: The Benefits of Restoring the Great Lakes Ecosystem*, estimated over \$50 billion in long-term benefits. Direct economic benefits from tourism, fishing and recreation alone are estimated at \$6.5 billion to \$11.8 billion. Additional high-value restoration opportunities include remediating Areas of Concern to raise coastal property values (\$12-19 billion); and implementing sediment management actions to reduce water treatment costs to municipalities (\$50-125 million). These estimates represent only a portion of the total long-term economic benefits projected by the Brookings study.

## More Information

**Great Lakes Restoration Initiative:** [www.greatlakesrestoration.us](http://www.greatlakesrestoration.us)

**Great Lakes Multi-Year Restoration Action Plan:** <http://greatlakesrestoration.us/action/?p=5>

**Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy:** [www.gllrc.us/strategy.html](http://www.gllrc.us/strategy.html)

**The Brookings Institution Great Lakes Economic Initiative:** [www.brookings.edu/projects/great-lakes.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/projects/great-lakes.aspx)