

# Great Lakes 2020

## A Vision for a Healthy and Resilient Great Lakes Basin

Great Lakes Commission 2020 Federal Priorities

### Protecting an Economic Asset and Ecological Wonder

The Great Lakes are the economic, ecological and cultural backbone of our eight-state, two-province region. With nearly one-third of U.S. and Canadian economic activity centered around the Great Lakes and 95 percent of our nation's fresh surface water, the Great Lakes are a natural treasure and a vital economic asset. Restoring, protecting and wisely managing them is an enduring, bipartisan priority for our nation and for the people of the Great Lakes region and their elected leaders.

### A Leadership Agenda for the Great Lakes

The Great Lakes Commission convenes the states and provinces—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Ontario, Pennsylvania, Québec and Wisconsin—to speak collectively for a healthy, vibrant Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin. Established by the Great Lakes Basin Compact of 1955 and authorized by Congress in 1968, the Commission promotes, plans for, and invests in the use, development and conservation of the water resources of the Great Lakes Basin.

Following interstate and federal agreements under the Great Lakes Basin Compact, the Great Lakes Commission urges Congress and the administration to:

- **Fund and reauthorize the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative** to help communities clean up degraded areas and create new economic opportunities along their waterfronts.
- **Safeguard drinking water and modernize clean water infrastructure** to protect public health, support business and industry, and help revitalize communities.
- **Strengthen the Great Lakes navigation system** to support the national economy, create jobs, and reduce traffic congestion.
- **Protect against invasive species** like invasive carp, zebra mussels and sea lamprey.
- **Promote agricultural conservation** to protect water quality, reduce nutrient pollution, and prevent harmful algal blooms.
- **Build resilience** to protect the people, places, economy, and environment of the Great Lakes Basin.
- **Invest in a collaborative, data-driven approach** such as Blue Accounting to set Basinwide goals and track progress.

## Looking Ahead: Challenges for the New Decade

Harmful Algal Blooms

Safe Drinking Water

Resilient Great Lakes Basin

Aquatic Invasive Species

Infrastructure

**These priorities outline specific investments that will strengthen our nation, create jobs, protect public health and revitalize communities.**

## Accelerate the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Fully fund and reauthorize the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to maintain progress in cleaning up and restoring North America's greatest freshwater resource.



- Fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative at \$320 million to continue environmental cleanup efforts, reduce nutrient pollution that causes harmful algal blooms, and safeguard the Great Lakes from invasive carp and other damaging aquatic invasive species.
- Reauthorize the GLRI through FY 2026 and increase the authorized funding level to the first year's appropriation of \$475 million to provide U.S. EPA, the Great Lakes states, and other parties the flexibility to address remaining restoration needs.

## Safeguard Drinking Water and Modernize Clean Water Infrastructure

Invest in water infrastructure to safeguard drinking water, rebuild failing wastewater systems, support business and industry, and help revitalize communities.



- Enhance funding for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund programs.
- Support the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Program and reforms to increase private sector investment in water infrastructure and new clean water technologies.
- Fund provisions from *America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018* that support states and local communities in repairing, maintaining and upgrading wastewater, drinking water and stormwater infrastructure.
- Expediently implement U.S. EPA's PFAS Action Plan; establish a federal drinking water standard for PFAS; and support efforts to improve monitoring, detection, and coordination between state and federal agencies to clean up PFAS pollution and other emerging contaminants from former military bases and other sources.

## Strengthen Commercial Navigation

Strengthen the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River navigation system by maintaining and upgrading locks, ports and related infrastructure and ensuring the dredging and icebreaking capacity needed to keep waterways open to commerce.



- Provide funding to ensure continued, efficient construction of a new Soo Lock, as well as critically needed maintenance and rehabilitation of the existing Poe and MacArthur locks.
- Fully appropriate funds from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund—including dedicated funding for the Great Lakes Navigation System—to support dredging and maintenance of Great Lakes harbors, channels and navigation infrastructure. In addition, disperse previously collected but unspent trust funds to address the more than half billion-dollar backlog in dredging and maintenance of navigation infrastructure in the Great Lakes maritime transportation system, including maintaining harbors and channels at their fully authorized dimensions, as appropriate to maintain commerce.
- Reform the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund to require that all revenues collected are appropriated annually for their intended purpose—maintaining our nation's commercial navigation system.
- Provide funding for construction of a new heavy icebreaker for the Great Lakes and maintenance of existing icebreaking vessels to ensure the U.S. Coast Guard can remove ice jams, minimize flood hazards, and maintain federal navigation channels in the Great Lakes Navigation System.
- Provide U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) with the resources needed to facilitate cross-border movement of cargo and passengers, including a growing cruise tourism economy in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence navigation system. Congress should direct CBP to establish flexible specifications for cargo and cruise facilities to fit the Great Lakes market, and to provide reasonable time to demonstrate market potential for specific activities.

**PHOTOS Cover:** Picured Rocks National Lakeshore on Lake Superior in Munising, Michigan, ©shutterstock. **This page, top to bottom:** Indiana Dunes National Park on Lake Michigan in Porter, Indiana, ©flickr/Tom Gill; girl drinking water ©shutterstock; the bulk carrier *Alpena* in the Soo Locks in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, ©Doug Herdman. **Next page, top to bottom:** Silver carp (a variety of Asian carp) in the Fox River in Illinois, ©U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ryan Hagerty; aerial view of harmful algal blooms in western Lake Erie on September 26, 2017, ©NASA Earth Observatory, Joshua Stevens, using Landsat data from the U.S. Geological Survey; Seagull Point Park on Lake Huron in Rogers City, Michigan, ©flickr/Erik Przekop.

## Protect Against Invasive Species

Invest in solutions to prevent the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species.



- Authorize the Chief's Report for the Brandon Road Project to prevent the movement of invasive carp and other aquatic invasive species (AIS) from the Mississippi River Basin into the Great Lakes Basin in accordance with Illinois Public Water laws. The nonfederal cost share for construction should reflect Congress' acknowledgement that this project is a national priority.
- Fund the preconstruction engineering and design of the Brandon Road Project. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should work with the state of Illinois as the sole non-federal sponsor for the project and the other supporting states and provinces to prepare for its most practical and effective implementation.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should complete the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study to prevent AIS transfer between the Mississippi River and Great Lakes watersheds.
- Provide funding to fully implement successful AIS programs, including the federal AIS task force, regional AIS panels and state AIS management plans established under the National Invasive Species Act, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's sea lamprey control program, and the Asian Carp Action Plan.
- U.S. EPA and the U.S. Coast Guard should implement the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act (VIDA) in close consultation with Great Lakes states, the Great Lakes Commission and the Canadian government to establish effective ballast water regulations that are binationally compatible and reflect the unique needs of the Great Lakes Basin.
- U.S. EPA should consult with the Great Lakes states, the Great Lakes Commission, and the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species to develop and implement the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain Invasive Species Program authorized in VIDA, and Congress should fund the program.

## Promote Conservation Actions

Strengthen agricultural conservation programs to protect water quality, reduce nutrient pollution, enhance wildlife habitat and bolster the farm economy.



- Provide full funding for Farm Bill agricultural conservation programs, including the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, which targets the Great Lakes as a "critical conservation area."
- Implement reforms from the 2018 Farm Bill to strategically target conservation programs that protect the Great Lakes from harmful algal blooms and safeguard drinking water.
- Support soil health initiatives and other farmer-led efforts to improve farmland and withstand fluctuating weather patterns.

## Build a Resilient Great Lakes Basin Environment and Economy

Support state, federal, and local actions to ensure the people, places, economy, and environment of the Great Lakes Basin are resilient for future generations.



- Fund the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study to develop a collaborative, risk-based decision framework that identifies opportunities to improve coastal resiliency over a range of future conditions across the Great Lakes Basin.
- Support the Great Lakes Commission in its role under the Great Lakes Basin Compact to convene U.S. and Canadian stakeholders to develop a framework and action plan for economic and ecological resilience in the Great Lakes Basin.

## Invest in a Collaborative, Data-Driven Approach to Basinwide Decision-Making

Provide leadership and share information to guide Great Lakes investments and ensure regional accountability.

- Federal agencies should manage and share data and information to guide investments and measure progress toward common goals for the Great Lakes. Congress and the administration should support the Blue Accounting initiative, managed by the Great Lakes Commission, in tracking investments and assessing progress toward desired outcomes for environmental, economic and social priorities for the binational Great Lakes Basin.
- The federal government should continue strengthening dialogue and decision-making across agencies and coordination with state and local Great Lakes initiatives. This includes continued support for the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force to coordinate federal agency actions; a Great Lakes Science Forum; the creation of an Integrated Great Lakes Science Plan; a Great Lakes Advisory Board to provide recommendations from nonfederal stakeholders; an Action Plan to strategically target restoration efforts and measure progress; and annual reports to Congress to ensure accountability.



**The Great Lakes Commission:  
 Convening Leaders and Facilitating Basinwide Solutions  
 A FRAMEWORK for a RESILIENT GREAT LAKES BASIN**

The binational Great Lakes Basin contains 20 percent of the world’s surface freshwater. The Basin also supports an estimated \$6 trillion economy—in many ways serving as the engine of innovation for North America. These world-class assets face challenges from a wide range of changes in the global economy, innovations in technology and transportation, changing populations and communities, aging infrastructure, and variability in weather, precipitation and lake levels.

The Great Lakes Commission urges the United States to pursue policies and investments that ensure the Great Lakes Basin will be protected, productive, durable, and resilient for generations to come.

The Commission also continues to advance collaborative Basinwide work in:

- Looking forward to the next generation of federal, state and local investment in Great Lakes restoration and revitalization
- Investing in a modern, efficient and connected maritime transportation system
- Building a concerted binational effort to manage and eradicate aquatic invasive species
- Supporting consensus-based, binationally compatible ballast water policy
- Cultivating a shared understanding of resilience in the Great Lakes Basin
- Developing an action plan designed to build and support a resilient Great Lakes future for:

**Resilient communities**

**Resilient waters and shorelines**

**Resilient agriculture and food production**

**Resilient infrastructure**

**Resilient and sustainable economies**

**Resilient transportation systems**

**Resilient ecosystems**

As we explore ways to invest in a resilient Great Lakes Basin, we invite and encourage the Great Lakes Congressional Task Force, Congress and the administration to join the Commission, the Great Lakes states and provinces and the Great Lakes Basin community **as we all work together to ensure a healthy future for the environment, economy, people and communities** of the Great Lakes Basin.

To support the Commission’s work in the area of resilience, the Commission has appointed a standing committee on climate resilience. In 2020 the Commission also intends to appoint or reestablish several other standing committees—each focused on one of a wide range of topics and each designed to meet the unique needs and interests of the Great Lakes Basin and its states, provinces and communities.

**About the Great Lakes Commission** The Great Lakes Commission convenes the states and provinces—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Ontario, Pennsylvania, Québec and Wisconsin—and other key voices to develop best practices and evidence-based policy, and to speak collectively for a healthy, vibrant Great Lakes Basin. Established by the Great Lakes Basin Compact of 1955 and authorized by Congress in 1968, the Commission promotes the use, development and conservation of the water resources of the Great Lakes Basin.

