

# SUSTAINING GREAT LAKES RESTORATION AND ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

GREAT LAKES COMMISSION FEDERAL PRIORITIES FOR 2016 | FEBRUARY 2016

## GREAT LAKES PRIORITIES BY THE NUMBERS

**\$50  
BILLION**

**Long-term economic return on investment from fully implementing our Great Lakes restoration strategy.** Progress to date is impressive. It is essential that Congress formally authorize the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to sustain it through the transition to the next presidential administration. **OUR PRIORITY:** *Pass authorizing legislation to strengthen and accelerate efforts to revitalize the Great Lakes economy and environment.*

**\$160  
MILLION**

**Economic loss from a 30-day closure of the Soo Locks.** The Great Lakes Navigation System links 140 U.S. ports to the world economy, moving 181 million tons of cargo annually and generating more than 225,000 jobs. **OUR PRIORITY:** *Provide resources to maintain and enhance critical infrastructure that supports the Great Lakes Navigation System, including dredging and a new lock at Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.*

**6 OF 31**

**Heavily polluted Areas of Concern cleaned up so far under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.** With continued funding, another 10 will be cleaned up in the next phase of the program, along with other critical actions to restore the Great Lakes. **OUR PRIORITY:** *Continue progress in restoring the health of the region's most polluted areas by sustaining funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative in Fiscal Year 2017.*

**4  
MILLION  
POUNDS**

**Amount of Asian carp removed from the Illinois River as part of state and federal control efforts, reducing the carp population by 68 percent in the most upstream areas where they are found.** However, concerns remain about the downstream presence of young carp and successful spawning in the past two years, underscoring the need to sustain and strengthen effective removal efforts while longer-term plans to keep carp and other invasive species out of the Great Lakes evolve. **OUR PRIORITY:** *Coordinate with Illinois and other Great Lakes states and federal and local partners to maintain successful monitoring and control efforts that have reduced the carp population in the Illinois River. Provide the necessary funding to the Army Corps of Engineers to complete the current study to fully assess the viability of strengthening a single control point at the Brandon Road Lock and Dam to prevent the one-way, upstream transfer of aquatic invasive species while maintaining or enhancing beneficial uses of the waterway system for flood control, water quality, recreation and barge transportation.*

**48  
MILLION**

**U.S. and Canadian citizens who receive their drinking water from the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin.** Failing water infrastructure threatens public health, pollutes our waterways and damages local economies. **OUR PRIORITY:** *Help communities upgrade aging water infrastructure and safeguard drinking water.*

**300  
SQUARE MILES**

**Surface area of Lake Erie covered by dense algae caused by the 2015 bloom—the largest on record.** Programs to prevent polluted runoff that causes harmful algae blooms must be strengthened and targeted to the highest priority watersheds. **OUR PRIORITY:** *Ensure Farm Bill programs are effectively targeting watersheds contributing the most polluted runoff to the Great Lakes.*

# TOP PRIORITIES FOR THE GREAT LAKES



## Sustain Progress under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Continued funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) will build on our investments and help the region advance long-term goals for a healthy economy, sustained by a revitalized ecosystem. The GLRI is generating real results, with more than 2,500 restoration projects implemented, six Areas of Concern cleaned up, a 70 percent increase in farmland enrolled in conservation programs, 150,000 acres of habitat restored, and more than 3,400 miles of rivers opened for native fish. During its next phase – FY 2015-2019 – the GLRI will focus on cleaning up ten more Areas of Concern, reducing phosphorus runoff that causes harmful algal blooms, controlling invasive species, and restoring habitat for native species. The Commission urges Congress and the Administration to continue this successful program to ensure complete implementation of our regional restoration strategy.

**REQUEST:** Provide at least \$300 million for the GLRI in FY 2017 with a focus on cleaning up heavily degraded Areas of Concern, controlling Asian carp and other invasive species, preventing polluted runoff that causes toxic algae, and restoring habitat for valuable fish and wildlife resources.

## Pass Comprehensive Legislation to Enhance and Accelerate Great Lakes Conservation Efforts

Congress should formally authorize the GLRI and other critical, existing Great Lakes programs to strengthen coordination with regional stakeholders and binational cooperation with Canada. The Commission supports legislation that

- Formally authorizes the GLRI to provide clear legislative direction and funding for Great Lakes restoration efforts;
- Authorizes U.S. EPA to lead the Federal Interagency Task Force to coordinate activities among federal agencies; and
- Advances implementation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement with Canada.

**REQUEST:** Pass comprehensive legislation that authorizes and funds important existing Great Lakes programs and provides a strong regional framework to sustain effective restoration, protection and ongoing management of the Great Lakes.

## Protect the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River from Asian Carp and other Invasive Species

Congress and federal agencies must recognize that aquatic invasive species threaten our nation's environment and the economic health of local communities. Asian carp are just the latest example of a national problem. The U.S. should strengthen federal programs to prevent harmful species from being introduced via the trade in live animals. Congress and the administration should maintain support for successful programs, including those under the National Invasive Species Act and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's sea lamprey control program.

Congress and federal agencies should also support effective monitoring, research and control efforts under the Asian Carp Control Strategy Framework. These efforts must be developed in close coordination with Illinois and include input from other Great Lakes states and provinces. Congress and the Administration should provide funding and direction to the Army Corps of Engineers to complete the Brandon Road Feasibility Study and it should result in a Chief's Report to Congress as quickly as practicable. The Corps of Engineers and other partners should continue work on a comprehensive, long-term solution to prevent all aquatic invasive species from transferring between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds, with further study of a system of possible control points in Chicago-area waterways, as recommended by the Chicago Area Waterway System Advisory Committee. All efforts must carefully consider impacts on flooding, water quality, recreation and barge transportation in northeast Illinois and northwest Indiana.

**REQUEST:** Build a more effective, comprehensive, national program to protect aquatic resources from invasive species by expanding programs under the National Invasive Species Act, including the national task force, regional panels, state management plans and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's sea lamprey control program. Strengthen federal programs to prevent the importation of invasive species not already established in North America. Provide funding and direction to the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. EPA to coordinate with Illinois and other states and provinces as they implement existing Asian carp monitoring and response plans. Complete the Brandon Road Feasibility Study as quickly as practicable and continue investigations of a long-term solution to prevent all aquatic invasive species transfer between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds.



## Help Communities Safeguard Drinking Water by Upgrading Aging Water Infrastructure

Failing wastewater infrastructure continues to release sewage and polluted stormwater into local waterways every year, contaminating Great Lakes beaches, threatening public health and damaging local economies. Similarly, aging drinking water infrastructure is a costly challenge for many communities, as illustrated by threats to drinking water in Toledo, Ohio, from toxic algae in Lake Erie, and in Flint, Michigan, from aging water pipes. These incidents underscore the need to help public agencies detect, manage and treat contaminated drinking water. The Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs are the primary vehicles to assist states and local communities in upgrading water infrastructure. Additionally, U.S. EPA and state and local agencies should collaborate in implementing the recently released strategic plan for protecting drinking water from harmful algal blooms.

**REQUEST:** Provide funding for the Clean Water and Drinking Water SRF programs in FY 2017 to repair failing water infrastructure, including replacing lead pipes in drinking water systems, treating or avoiding toxic algae, separating combined sewers and upgrading sewage treatment plants. Federal agencies should collaborate with state and local officials on standards and practices to detect toxic algae and safeguard drinking water supplies.

## Ensure that Farm Bill Conservation Programs Target Watersheds Contributing Polluted Runoff to the Great Lakes

Soil erosion and runoff of nutrients, fertilizers and other chemicals from agricultural lands can pollute rivers and streams and contribute to harmful algal blooms, such as those impacting Lake Erie. The 2014 Farm Bill created a new Regional Conservation Partnership Program to support locally-led conservation projects and prioritized the Great Lakes as a Critical Conservation Area with a focus on actions to prevent algal blooms. The Great Lakes states, landowners, conservation groups and other partners are using this program to reduce nutrient pollution in our region's most heavily impacted areas, such as Western Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay and Green Bay. The Lake Erie states and the Province of Ontario have committed to reduce phosphorus introduced to Lake Erie by 40 percent by 2025. Continued effort is needed to prioritize conservation activities in watersheds with the greatest needs and to coordinate these efforts with related initiatives. The new strategic plan for Western Lake Erie, currently being developed by USDA-NRCS, should be completed soon and implemented in a way to deliver on-the-ground actions to achieve nutrient reduction targets for Lake Erie.

**REQUEST:** Ensure full funding for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program and effective implementation and oversight to focus resources on watersheds affecting water quality in the Great Lakes. The Natural Resources Conservation Service should collaborate with the Great Lakes states to coordinate delivery of Farm Bill programs to support state priorities and regional initiatives.

## Support Infrastructure Improvements and other Needs to Maintain the Great Lakes Navigation System

The economic viability of our water transportation system is at risk due to insufficient funding for dredging, diminishing options for disposing dredged material and aging navigation infrastructure, including the Soo locks in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. The 2014 Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) included provisions that will benefit the Great Lakes region, including reform of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF); dedicated funding for Great Lakes ports and recreational harbors; and direction to the Army Corps of Engineers to manage the Great Lakes as a single, integrated navigation system. These important changes must be fully implemented and closely coordinated with the Great Lakes states, the navigation industry and local stakeholders. In addition, other options for using dredged material are critical to reduce the need for its disposal in the open waters of the Great Lakes. A study is underway on the costs and benefits of building a new large lock at Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. This project should move forward to modernize this infrastructure that is critical to our national security and our regional and national economies.

**REQUEST:** As directed in WRRDA, increase appropriations from the HMTF, including dedicated funding for Great Lakes ports and recreational harbors. The Corps of Engineers should implement a new funding approach that manages the Great Lakes as a single, integrated navigation system, with close consultation with the Great Lakes states and regional stakeholders. Allow flexibility in applying federal standards to promote beneficial alternatives to the disposal of dredged material in the Great Lakes. Advance efforts to study and build a new large lock at Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

## Support Information Management to Improve Regional Decisionmaking in the Great Lakes

Decisionmakers need improved information to guide investments and measure progress toward our common goals for the Great Lakes. At the request of the Great Lakes governors, the Great Lakes Commission is implementing Blue Accounting (<http://bit.ly/BlueAccounting>), a regional information strategy that provides Great Lakes leaders with measures of progress being made toward shared desired outcomes on a broad range of human uses, economic activities and conservation priorities. To be effective, this strategy requires sustained support and cooperation from government agencies, business and industry, and other partners.

**REQUEST:** Ensure federal agencies support Great Lakes information management efforts by providing technical expertise, collaboration, data access and support for informed decisionmaking.

**Photos:** Previous page: Lake Superior and Duluth, Minn., as seen from Enger Tower. ©flickr/ Tony Webster. | Below: A panoramic view of Presque Isle Bay in Presque Isle, Pa. In February 2013, after reviewing the success of cleanup activities, Presque Isle Bay was removed from the binational list of Great Lakes Areas of Concern. ©flickr/ Richard Yuan.





## Maintain Base Funding for Federal Programs

Congress has been clear that GLRI funding is intended to be *in addition to* base funding for many essential programs.

**REQUEST:** Support federal programs that contribute to the ongoing restoration, protection and effective management of the Great Lakes. Examples of important programs include, but are not limited to, the following:

### Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service  
and the new Regional Conservation  
Partnership Program

Farm Service Agency

U.S. Forest Service conservation programs

### Department of the Interior

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,  
Aquatic Invasive Species Program

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Great Lakes  
Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act

U.S. Geological Survey,  
Great Lakes Science Center

U.S. Geological Survey, National  
Streamflow Information Program

### Department of State

Great Lakes Fishery Commission,  
Sea Lamprey Control Program

International Joint Commission,  
U.S. Section

### Environmental Protection Agency

State Revolving Funds for Clean Water  
and Drinking Water

BEACH Act Grants

Clean Water Act Section 106 Water  
Pollution Control Program and Section  
319 Watershed Restoration Program

Great Lakes National Program Office

Office of Research and Development Labs  
in Duluth, Minn. and Grosse Ile, Mich.

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Center for Sponsored  
Coastal Ocean Research

Coastal and Estuarine Land  
Conservation Program

Coastal Zone Management  
Act Grants

Great Lakes Environmental  
Research Laboratory

Great Lakes Habitat  
Restoration Program

Integrated Ocean Observing  
System, Great Lakes  
Observing System

National Sea Grant  
College Program

### U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Great Lakes Fishery and  
Ecosystem Restoration Program

Great Lakes Navigation  
Operations and Maintenance

Great Lakes Recreational  
Harbors Dredging

Great Lakes Remedial  
Action Plan Program

Great Lakes and Mississippi  
River Interbasin Study

**About the Great Lakes Commission:** The Great Lakes Commission was established by the Great Lakes states in 1955 to coordinate management of the water resources of the Great Lakes basin and to represent the states' interests on Great Lakes matters before the federal government. Based in Ann Arbor, Mich., the Commission promotes the concept that a healthy environment and prosperous economy should be mutually dependent, not exclusive, goals. With appointees from the eight states, the Commission serves as a forum for the development of regional policy, and as an advocate for legislation and programs to benefit the Great Lakes. The Canadian provinces of Ontario and Québec participate in all Commission deliberations and activities as associate members.

**Photos, top to bottom:** The Ohio Sea Grant Stone Laboratory Algal & Water Quality Lab drops a monitoring buoy in Lake Erie near Gibraltar Island, Ohio. ©flickr/ Ohio Sea Grant. | A freighter navigates the Detroit River in front of the Renaissance Center in Detroit, Mich. ©flickr/ James Marvin Phelps. | U.S. Geological Survey Lake Ontario Biological Station engineer Ted Strang and biologist Dr. Brian Weidel with an adult lake sturgeon collected near Olcott, New York. ©flickr/ U.S. Geological Survey. | The Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery in Wild Rose, Wis., which has been enhancing and restoring fish populations in Wisconsin for more than a century. ©flickr/ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-Midwest Region.



2805 S. Industrial Hwy, Suite 100, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-6791  
contacts: Tim Eder, [teder@glc.org](mailto:teder@glc.org); Matt Doss, [mdoss@glc.org](mailto:mdoss@glc.org)  
tel: 734-971-9135 fax: 734-971-9150

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