

A D V A N C I N G

Economic Strength and Environmental Integrity for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region

Great Lakes Commission Federal Priorities for 2014

MARCH 2014



Split Rock Lighthouse on Lake Superior, Two Harbors, Minn.

Building a **Brighter Future** for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River are a natural treasure and a vital economic asset that give our eight-state, two-province region a unique competitive advantage. With 90 percent of our nation's supply of fresh surface water, the Great Lakes provide vital benefits for the 36 million Americans and Canadians who live in the region, including unparalleled recreational opportunities for residents and tourists; abundant fresh water for communities and industries; an efficient transportation system for raw materials and finished goods; and extensive habitat for fish and wildlife.

Restoring, protecting and wisely using the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River are fundamental to our broader strategy to create jobs, stimulate economic development and strengthen waterfront communities. With proper care and sound investments, the Great Lakes will continue to be a foundation for economic prosperity and a high quality of life for our region's future.

Sustaining Our Progress

We are making real progress in cleaning up the Great Lakes and addressing threats to their health. Most significantly, we are implementing the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), an unprecedented regional effort that is addressing serious problems facing the Great Lakes. This action-oriented initiative is translating our regional restoration strategy into site-specific projects that are cleaning up contaminated Areas of Concern, reducing phosphorus runoff that causes harmful algal blooms, and preventing the introduction and spread of invasive species such as Asian carp.

There is still much work to be done and it is critical that the GLRI be carried through to completion. Great Lakes restoration is a wise investment that is projected to generate over \$50 billion in long-term economic benefits.

Regional Priorities for the Great Lakes

The Great Lakes Commission urges Congress and the Administration to support the following regional priorities to sustain our restoration efforts and address specific challenges to the long-term environmental and economic health of the Great Lakes.

- ▶ Take action to protect the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River against **Asian carp** and other invasive species
- ▶ Sustain progress under the **Great Lakes Restoration Initiative**
- ▶ Pass comprehensive legislation to strengthen and accelerate **Great Lakes conservation efforts**
- ▶ Help communities upgrade aging **water infrastructure**
- ▶ Support **Farm Bill programs** that prevent polluted runoff and protect water quality
- ▶ Maintain and improve infrastructure for the **Great Lakes navigation system**

Top Priorities for the Great Lakes



Chicago River leading to Lake Michigan, Chicago, Ill.

► Take Action to Protect the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River against Asian Carp and other Aquatic Invasive Species

The Administration and Congress must act with urgency to prevent the introduction and spread of Asian carp and other aquatic invasive species. This includes providing funding and direction to the Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies to develop alternatives from the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study (GLMRIS), and supporting immediate control measures recommended by regional leaders and local partners in the Chicago area. Asian carp are a national problem and Congress should provide funding to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) to lead a comprehensive national control effort. Our country remains vulnerable to invasive species introduced via the trade in live animals – as occurred with Asian carp – and action is needed to strengthen federal programs to prevent harmful species from being imported. Congress should provide full funding for the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's successful sea lamprey control program.

Request: Provide funding and direction to the Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies to advance alternatives from the GLMRIS report and support implementation of control measures that can move forward immediately. Support a comprehensive national Asian carp control program led by USF&WS and the successful sea lamprey control program led by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. Take action to strengthen federal programs to prevent the importation of invasive species.

► Sustain Progress under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Sustaining funding for the GLRI is critical to build on the investments underway at the federal, state and local level and help the region “get the job done!” The GLRI Action Plan is being updated and a regional advisory board has been established to guide the restoration program. We are making progress in achieving the Initiative's goals, with special emphasis on cleaning up degraded Areas of Concern, reducing phosphorus runoff that contributes to harmful algal blooms, and preventing the introduction and spread of harmful aquatic invasive species. The Commission urges Congress and the Administration to continue this successful program to ensure complete implementation of our regional restoration strategy.

Request: Provide \$300 million - \$475 million for the GLRI in FY 2015. Update the GLRI Action Plan to guide the restoration program over the next five years, with strengthened performance measures and reporting to better track progress, and actions to account for challenges outside the scope of the GLRI, such as climate change and failing wastewater infrastructure.

Silver carp, a variety of Asian carp.



► Pass Comprehensive Legislation to Strengthen and Accelerate Great Lakes Conservation Efforts

The Great Lakes Ecological and Economic Protection Act (GLEEPA) has been introduced by the bipartisan leaders of the House and Senate Great Lakes task forces to authorize several critical, existing Great Lakes programs and strengthen coordination with regional stakeholders and binational cooperation with Canada. The Commission supports legislation that will

- Authorize the GLRI to target significant problems facing the basin at a funding level of \$475 million annually
- Reauthorize U.S. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office to facilitate policy and administrative tasks relating to the Great Lakes
- Reauthorize the Great Lakes Legacy Act at a funding level of \$150 million annually to remove contaminated sediments from the Great Lakes basin
- Establish a Great Lakes Advisory Board to secure input from the states and regional stakeholders
- Authorize a Federal Interagency Task Force to coordinate restoration efforts among federal agencies
- Advance implementation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement with Canada

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

► Help Local Communities Upgrade Aging Water Infrastructure

Aging wastewater infrastructure allows the release of inadequately treated sewage into local waterways every year. Sewage discharges continue to close Great Lakes beaches, threaten public health and damage local economies. Similarly, degraded drinking water infrastructure is a costly challenge for many communities. The Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs assist states and local communities in upgrading water infrastructure.

Request: Provide funding for the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water SRFs in FY 2015 to repair failing water infrastructure, including separating combined sewers and upgrading sewage treatment plants to prevent the release of nutrients that contribute to harmful algal blooms in the Great Lakes. Include provisions for low-interest loans and grants to assist economically struggling communities.

► Support Farm Bill Programs that Prevent Polluted Runoff and Protect Water Quality

Soil erosion and runoff of nutrients, fertilizers and other chemicals from agricultural lands can pollute rivers and streams and contribute to harmful algal blooms – a growing problem in the Great Lakes. The recently passed Farm Bill provides an important opportunity to safeguard the Great Lakes and address threats to agricultural productivity and water quality. The bill includes a new Regional Conservation Partnership Program that – if fully funded and implemented – will strengthen our region's ability to address priority watersheds with the greatest conservation needs. This will enable the Great Lakes states, regional organizations, landowners and other partners to respond to local priorities related to soil erosion, habitat protection and water quality. Ultimately, this will benefit landowners and their communities, while safeguarding the health of the Great Lakes.

Request: Provide funding for and expedite implementation of new Farm Bill programs that implement soil conservation and water quality protection measures, including the Regional Conservation Partnership Program that focuses on reducing nutrient pollution in priority watersheds, with input from the Great Lakes states and in coordination with state priorities.

► Maintain and Improve Infrastructure for the Great Lakes Navigation System

The economic viability of our water transportation system is at risk due to reduced funding for dredging, lower water levels in the lakes, diminishing options for disposing of dredged material and aging navigation infrastructure. The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) currently being considered by Congress includes important provisions that will reform the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) to ensure that monies collected are used to maintain our nation's navigation infrastructure; and implement a new approach that manages the Great Lakes as a single, integrated system, recognizing the interdependence of our ports and harbors. New approaches are also needed to support dredging of recreational harbors, which are vital to the economic health of coastal communities.

Request: Increase appropriations from the HMTF with a primary focus on critical needs facing authorized navigation projects. The Army Corps of Engineers should implement a new funding approach that manages the Great Lakes as a single, integrated navigation system in close consultation with the Great Lakes states and regional stakeholders. Support efforts to secure resources for dredging of small harbors.



Central Beach, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore on Lake Michigan in Michigan City, Ind.

► 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 Safe 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

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

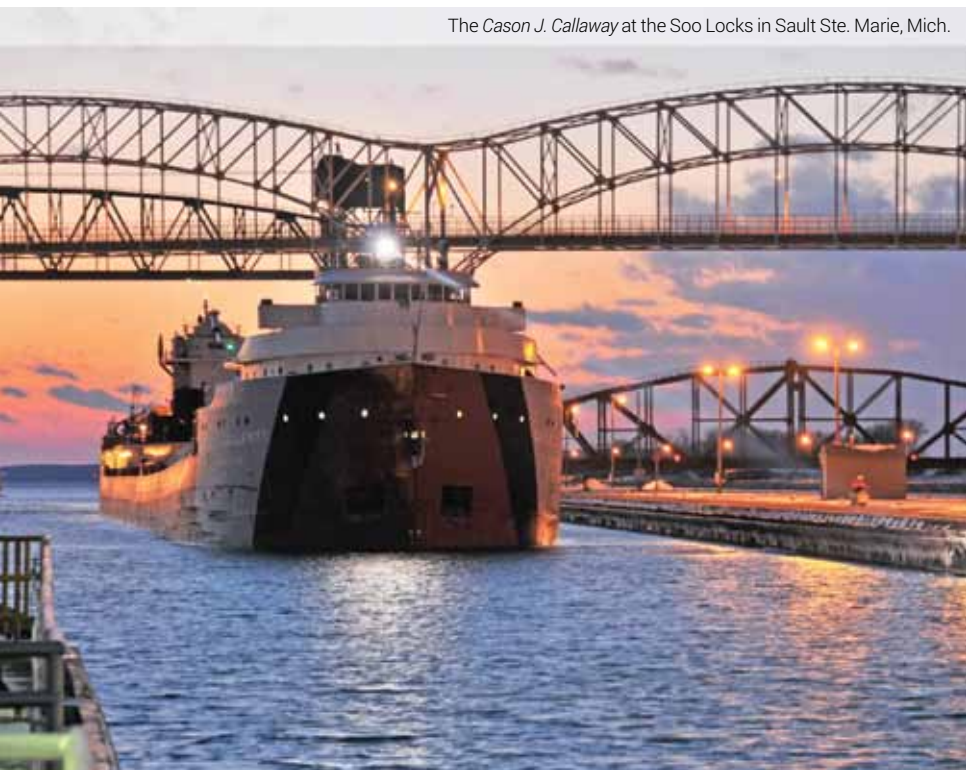
Great Lakes Navigation Operations and Maintenance

Great Lakes Recreational Harbors Dredging

Great Lakes Remedial Action Plan Program

Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study

The Cason J. Callaway at the Soo Locks in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.



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.

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