

For immediate release

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Great Lakes Commission welcomes legislation authorizing Great Lakes cleanup funding

Ann Arbor, Mich. – The Great Lakes Commission welcomes legislation introduced yesterday by Sen. Mark Kirk (R-IL) and co-sponsored by Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) that formally authorizes funding for a comprehensive restoration program for the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2015 legally recognizes the initiative, an ambitious regional restoration program for the Great Lakes that is cleaning up degraded “toxic hotspots” to help revitalize coastal communities, halting Asian carp and other invasive species, and preventing polluted runoff that closes beaches and causes harmful algal blooms. While the program has been underway since 2010, the new legislation provides explicit congressional authorization and a more secure legal foundation to continue funding the program at up to \$300 million annually.

The bill directs the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to collaborate with the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force and state and local partners to select the best projects to restore the Great Lakes, with a focus on actions that can be implemented quickly, will achieve environmental outcomes outlined in the new Great Lakes Action Plan and Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and that leverage other funding.

“The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is making tremendous progress in revitalizing cities and cleaning up the Great Lakes. This legislation will further strengthen this unprecedented federal-state partnership,” said Great Lakes Commission Chairman Kelly Burch, executive director of Oil and Gas Operations with the Pennsylvania Dept. of Environmental Protection. “There’s more work ahead of us so it’s important that Congress provide a predictable and durable foundation to support our continued restoration efforts.”

Companion legislation was introduced in January by a bipartisan group in the House of Representatives. A similar bill in the Senate, the Great Lakes Ecological and Economic Protection Act, would authorize the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative at \$475 million and reauthorize several other Great Lakes programs. Legislation authorizing Great Lakes restoration funding was passed by the House in December 2014 but was not considered by the Senate before Congress adjourned. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative continues to enjoy strong, bipartisan support in Congress. In March a bipartisan group of 51 House members wrote to the Appropriations Committee urging sustained funding for the restoration program. Securing stand-alone authorization for the initiative is a top priority for the Great Lakes Commission and numerous other regional organizations.

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The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by Kelly Burch, executive director of oil and gas operations for the Pennsylvania Dept. of Environmental Protection, is an interstate compact agency established under state and U.S. federal law and dedicated to promoting a strong economy, healthy environment and high quality of life for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region and its residents. The Commission consists of governors’ appointees, state legislators, and agency officials from its eight member states. Associate membership for Ontario and Québec was established through the signing of a “Declaration of Partnership.” The Commission maintains a formal Observer program involving U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, tribal authorities, binational agencies and other regional interests. The Commission offices are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Learn more at www.glc.org.

Great Lakes Commission

Kelvin Burch (PA), Chair; Tim A. Eder, Executive Director

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