

**For immediate release**

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## Great Lakes Commission urges Congress to keep Great Lakes Restoration Initiative on path to success

**Washington, D.C.** – Citing the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River system as an “environmental and economic asset of vital importance to the nation,” the Great Lakes Commission called today for an ongoing federal commitment to the \$2.2 billion Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). This action headlined the Commission’s Fiscal Year 2012 legislative priorities, adopted at its 2011 Semiannual Meeting held in Washington, D.C., as part of the annual Great Lakes Day events on Capitol Hill.

“The GLRI has enabled us to take meaningful actions to restore the Great Lakes and achieve the vision that united the eight Great Lakes states in 2005 when we adopted our regional restoration plan,” said Commission Chair James Tierney, assistant commissioner for water resources at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. “We’re in Washington this week to let Congress know that Great Lakes restoration is firmly underway and to emphasize the importance of building on our investments to sustain the impressive results that we are just now beginning to see from this critical program.”

Other legislative priorities announced by the Commission include:

- providing funding to expedite efforts to prevent Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes and supporting effective invasive species prevention programs; and
- rebuilding critical wastewater infrastructure through full funding of the federal Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water Revolving Fund programs.

To heighten their impact in Washington, the Commission’s legislative priorities are coordinated with six other regional agencies and organizations, generating “one regional voice” for restoring and effectively managing the Great Lakes. In addition to the Great Lakes Commission, the legislative priorities are endorsed by the Healing our Waters®-Great Lakes Coalition, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority, Council of Great Lakes Industries, and the Great Lakes Metro Chambers Coalition.

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### Great Lakes Commission

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In a keynote address, Rep. Candice Miller (R-Mich.) encouraged participants, despite a challenging federal fiscal environment: “If we can prioritize Great Lakes issues, we can find some willing participation and support from members of Congress.” Rep. Miller said the Great Lakes, especially for a state like Michigan, provide us with our identity. “Protecting the Great Lakes – a magnificent national treasure – is up to all of us,” she said.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative was enacted in 2009 as a five-year strategy to restore and protect the environmental and economic integrity of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. It focuses on aquatic invasive species, contaminated sediments, polluted runoff, degraded wetlands, and impaired fish and wildlife resources. Following an appropriation of \$475 million in FY2010, the FY2011 budget proposed for the GLRI was reduced to \$300 million. The President’s FY2012 budget proposes \$350 million for the GLRI, a \$125 million cut from the planned \$475 million funding level.

“We understand the need for budgetary responsibility in Washington,” said Great Lakes Commission Executive Director Tim Eder, “but it is vital that we keep this important effort on track so we can leverage the Great Lakes as an economic resource for our region.” The Great Lakes are already responsible for 1.5 million jobs and \$62 million in wages and, looking forward, studies have shown that implementing the region’s comprehensive Great Lakes restoration plan would generate \$50 billion in long-term economic benefits.

As the GLRI moves forward, the Commission called on federal agencies to strengthen their coordination with the eight Great Lakes states and give them greater authority in leading Great Lakes restoration efforts. Commission Vice Chair Kari Bennett of Indiana emphasized that “the states and our local partners are on the ‘front line’ achieving on-the-ground results to make the GLRI a success. We are in the best position to direct resources efficiently to accomplish our shared restoration priorities.”

The Commission urged U.S. EPA, as it leads the GLRI, to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, streamline and coordinate multiple federal programs, provide flexibility in meeting cost-share requirements, and focus on actions that produce on-the-ground results for local communities in the Great Lakes region.

In other business, the Commission passed a resolution supporting reform of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund by requiring that future expenditures be applied to their intended purpose: maintaining federal harbors and navigation channels in the Great Lakes and throughout the country.

The Commission’s full list of legislative priorities for FY2012 and supporting documents are online at [www.glc.org/restore](http://www.glc.org/restore).

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*The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by James Tierney, assistant commissioner for water resources at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, 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](http://www.glc.org).*