

For immediate release
January 25, 2010

Contact: Tim Eder
Phone: 734-971-9135
E-mail: teder@glc.org

Contact: Matt Doss
Phone: 734-971-9135
E-mail: mdoss@glc.org

Great Lakes groups urge Obama to continue Restoration Initiative at full strength in 2011

Ann Arbor, Mich. – Fifteen Great Lakes regional organizations are urging President Obama to maintain or exceed funding of \$475 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) in the federal budget for FY 2011.

The initiative was proposed by the Obama Administration as a five-year, comprehensive restoration plan for the Great Lakes. The region's congressional leaders secured \$475 million in FY 2010, the initiative's first year. Implementation is moving forward, with nearly \$150 million currently being offered for projects that address critical problems facing the Great Lakes. In addition, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is finalizing a five-year action plan for the GLRI that sets outcome-oriented performance goals and criteria for measuring progress.

"While the GLRI is off to a strong start," wrote the 15 organizations in a co-signed letter to Obama, "we need sustained funding to fulfill your commitment, build on past investments and ensure the GLRI's long-term success."

The letter acknowledged the broad support for the initiative within the region, noting that it has been endorsed by the Great Lakes governors, states, cities, tribes, conservation groups, business and industry.

"The breadth of support for the GLRI throughout the region is unprecedented," said Great Lakes Commission Executive Director Tim Eder, noting that the Great Lakes states and their partners have moved aggressively to prepare large-scale restoration projects for implementation. "With the immense effort invested in this program, it's critical that Washington keep the GLRI moving forward at full speed," Eder added.

"The millions of people who depend on the Great Lakes for their jobs and way of life are counting on President Obama and the U.S. Congress to maintain their commitment to the lakes," said Jeff Skelding, campaign director for the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition. "Continuing to fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative – combined with other necessary policy actions – will be instrumental in the multi-year effort to restore and protect our lakes, boost our economy, safeguard our public health, and uphold our way of life."

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Great Lakes Commission

Gov. Patrick Quinn (IL), Chair; Tim A. Eder, Executive Director
Eisenhower Corporate Park • 2805 S. Industrial Hwy. Suite 100 • Ann Arbor, Michigan • 48104-6791
734-971-9135 • Fax: 734-971-9150 • Web: www.glc.org
Illinois • Indiana • Michigan • Minnesota • New York • Ohio • Ontario • Pennsylvania • Québec • Wisconsin

The letter noted that “substantial momentum is in place to carry the Initiative forward over its five-year timeframe.”

“Despite the severe budget constraints facing our region,” the letter reads, “we are committed to doing our part and investing the resources necessary to make the GLRI a success.” The letter concludes urging the President “to maintain full funding for the GLRI to build on the tremendous work done over the past year and uphold this unprecedented commitment to the eight-state Great Lakes region.”

“The Great Lakes are a defining asset of our region,” says Ed Wolking, Jr., executive vice president of the Detroit Regional Chamber. “The lakes represent significant potential for the revitalization of the Midwestern economy. Restoring and protecting the quality of the lakes is a critical step in our region’s economic future, and continuing to fund these significant clean-up activities will bring many good things to our economy in the years to come.”

The President is expected to submit his budget proposal to Congress on February 1.

The letter was signed by the following entities:

- Great Lakes Commission
- Alliance for the Great Lakes
- Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority
- Council of Great Lakes Fishery Agencies
- Council of Great Lakes Industries
- Council of Lake Committees
- Ducks Unlimited, Great Lakes/Atlantic Region
- Great Lakes Fishery Commission
- Great Lakes Metro Chambers Coalition
- Great Lakes United
- Healing Our Waters - Great Lakes Coalition
- National Parks Conservation Association
- National Wildlife Federation, Great Lakes Regional Center
- Natural Resources Defense Council, Midwest Regional Office
- The Nature Conservancy

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The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by Illinois Gov. Patrick Quinn, 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.