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May 8, 2018

Honorable Richard Shelby
Chair, Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment & Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee
on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman and Chairwoman Shelby and Murkowski, and Ranking Members Leahy and Udall:

The Great Lakes Commission urges you to provide funding in FY 2019 to sustain progress in restoring and protecting the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes are a natural treasure and a vital economic asset for our eight-state region. They provide drinking water for more than 48 million people, generate more than 1.5 million jobs, and support a \$5 trillion regional economy. Strong collaboration among our states and the federal government, local communities, and industry is solving the most serious problems facing the lakes while revitalizing economies in waterfront communities.

We urge you to sustain this progress by maintaining level funding of \$300 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) in FY 2019. The GLRI is a highly successful program that enjoys strong, bipartisan support in Congress, among our region's governors, business and industry, conservation organizations, tribes and local communities. Congress has formally authorized the program at \$300 million annually – a significant endorsement of its value.

The President's FY 2019 budget proposes \$30 million for the GLRI, only ten percent of the current funding level. This drastic reduction would severely hamper our ongoing regional efforts, slow the progress we are making and undermine past investments. For example, U.S. EPA needs more than \$80 million in FY 2019 to implement 16 toxic sediment cleanup projects in six states. These projects will leverage more than \$60 million in cost-share from nonfederal partners. The President's budget request would fund only a fraction of this important work and forfeit millions in nonfederal contributions. This is only a portion of the costs for the remaining cleanup work needed in the most degraded areas. In addition, the President's budget would impede efforts to prevent harmful algal blooms that threaten drinking water and protect the lakes from Asian carp and other harmful invasive species.

The GLRI has an important economic dimension and fully implementing our Great Lakes restoration strategy is projected to generate \$50 billion in long-term economic benefits. We are already seeing these results where cleanup work under the GLRI is helping communities revitalize degraded or underutilized waterfront areas and develop new opportunities for recreation, business growth and other uses. Funding the GLRI will ensure continuation of our collaborative efforts to strengthen the economic vitality of waterfront areas.

Congress has been a critical partner in advancing our efforts to maximize the Great Lakes as an environmental and economic asset for our region and the entire country. Indeed, with nearly one-third of U.S. and Canadian economic activity centered in the Great Lakes region and 95 percent of our nation's fresh surface water, bolstering this invaluable resource is a wise strategy that benefits our entire nation. We urge you to provide the funding needed to maintain our successful restoration program and help us sustain our regional strategy to create jobs, stimulate economic development, and strengthen waterfront communities. If you have questions, please contact the Commission's Executive Director, Darren Nichols (734-971-9135, dnichols@glc.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Linc Stine". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

John Linc Stine
Chair

cc: Members of the Senate Great Lakes delegation