



# *An Agenda for Great Lakes Restoration and Economic Revitalization*

Great Lakes Commission Federal Priorities for 2018

## **Protecting an Economic Powerhouse**

The eight-state, two-province Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River region is an economic powerhouse for the United States and Canada, generating nearly one-third of the two countries' combined economic output, jobs and exports. However, the economic, cultural and ecological benefits provided by the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River region are at risk from both new and historic threats:

**Safe drinking water** is endangered by failing water infrastructure, lead in drinking water lines, toxic algae, sewage overflows from overburdened wastewater systems, and impacts from extreme weather.

**Commercial navigation** is undermined by aging port infrastructure, unmet dredging needs in harbors and waterways, and the vulnerability of critical choke points, such as the Soo Locks.

**Jobs created by tourism and outdoor recreation** depend on clean water and healthy fish and wildlife populations, which are vulnerable to invasive species, pollution, beach closures, habitat loss, and poorly funded management and conservation programs.

**Economic development in coastal communities** is hampered by historic contamination, poorly utilized waterfront areas, failing infrastructure, inadequate support for clean-up and revitalization efforts, and vulnerability to climate change and extreme weather.

**The Great Lakes Commission calls on Congress and the Administration to take actions that will further protect and leverage the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River as vital economic and environmental assets. The priorities on the following pages outline investments that will create jobs, protect public health and revitalize struggling communities.**

**\$6 TRILLION** binational regional economy

**51 MILLION** U.S. and Canadian jobs

**\$235 BILLION** in trade between the Great Lakes states and provinces

**\$58 BILLION** binational economic impact from commercial navigation

**\$3.6 BILLION** in cost savings from waterborne transportation

**Drinking water for 48 MILLION** U.S. and Canadian citizens

**\$42 BILLION** from fishing and hunting in the Great Lakes states

**\$34 BILLION** from recreational boating in the Great Lakes states



## Modernize Water Infrastructure

**Invest in water infrastructure to safeguard drinking water, rebuild failing wastewater systems, support business and industry, and help revitalize communities.**

The Great Lakes region faces water infrastructure needs that threaten our drinking water, the health of lakes and rivers, and more than nine million jobs. Nearly \$10 billion is needed annually over the next two decades to maintain and upgrade drinking water, stormwater and wastewater infrastructure in the eight Great Lakes states. To complement state and local efforts, the Great Lakes Commission calls for increased federal investment and reforms to expand access to the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, Rural Development Infrastructure, and Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act programs. We also request reforms to increase private sector investment in water infrastructure and new clean water technologies, and to protect source water and promote water affordability. The Commission's 2017 Joint Action Plan for Clean Water Infrastructure and Services recommends these and other actions to advance a more sustainable water infrastructure system for the Great Lakes region.



## Strengthen Commercial Navigation

**Strengthen the Great Lakes navigation system by upgrading locks, ports and related infrastructure and ensuring dredging to keep waterways open to commerce.**

The Great Lakes Commission calls for continued federal investments to safeguard and grow the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River maritime transportation system, which links more than 100 U.S. and Canadian ports to the world economy, moves an average of approximately 175 million tons of cargo annually, and generates more than 225,000 jobs and \$58 billion in economic impact. The system is vital for our national economy and security as well, with nearly 100 percent of the iron ore needed for U.S. steel production passing through the Soo Locks. Key actions include full use of monies paid into the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund and dedicated funding for the Great Lakes; dredging to maintain channels and harbors; direction from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to manage the Great Lakes as a single, integrated navigation system; engaging stakeholders in developing innovative long-term solutions to dredged material management challenges; increasing opportunities for beneficial use of dredged material and reducing disposal of dredged material in the open waters of the Great Lakes; and a new large lock at the Soo Locks complex. The Commission also supports increased resources for U.S. Customs and Border Protection to facilitate cross-border movement of cargo and passengers, including a growing tourism economy on cruise vessels.



## Sustain Restoration

**Fully fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to maintain progress in cleaning up and restoring North America's greatest freshwater resource.**

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) is a highly successful, popular program that enjoys strong, bipartisan support from Congress and regional leaders. While we have made important progress under the GLRI, substantial work remains. Work is still underway in 20 Great Lakes Areas of Concern (our region's most heavily degraded areas) and hundreds of upcoming cleanup projects depend on GLRI funding. Cost-share agreements are in place with nonfederal sponsors for 16 toxic sediment cleanups in six states, with more sites being investigated. The GLRI is also helping to prevent beach closures and protect drinking water for 48 million people by working with farmers to prevent polluted runoff that causes harmful algal blooms. Finally, the GLRI is the most important and effective line of defense against Asian carp, with more than six million pounds of Asian carp trapped and removed from the Illinois River – an important pathway to Lake Michigan. The Great Lakes Commission urges Congress to provide \$300 million for the GLRI in FY 2019 to sustain this progress.





## Protect Against Invasive Species

### Safeguard the Great Lakes from aquatic invasive species.

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are one of the most significant threats to the environmental and economic health of the Great Lakes. Strong federal leadership and coordination with state agencies is needed to advance comprehensive efforts to prevent the introduction and spread of AIS from all pathways. The president and Congress should provide funding for successful programs, including the national task force, regional panels and state management plans established under the National Invasive Species Act, and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's sea lamprey control program. Federal agencies should use existing authorities like the Lacey Act to identify and restrict the importation of harmful non-native species. Efforts to combat the destructive spread of Asian carp across the United States and prevent their establishment in the Great Lakes region must include federal funding for the Asian Carp Action Plan and the National Asian Carp Management and Control Plan. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should complete the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study to prevent all AIS transfer between the Mississippi River and Great Lakes watersheds.



## Target Conservation Actions

### Strengthen agricultural conservation programs to protect water quality, enhance wildlife habitat and bolster the farm economy.

Federal investments in agricultural conservation practices are critical to protecting water quality and enhancing habitat for wildlife. Harmful algal blooms are a persistent threat to public health, drinking water safety and local economies, particularly in vulnerable areas such as Western Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay and Green Bay. For example, Lake Erie has experienced severe algal blooms in eight of the last ten years. Runoff of nutrients and soil erosion contribute to harmful algal blooms while also clogging our rivers and ports and diminishing agricultural productivity. Conservation programs authorized in the Farm Bill help solve these problems by enabling agricultural producers to conserve soil resources, improve water quality, and do their part to restore the Great Lakes. The 2018 Farm Bill should maintain, strengthen and strategically target conservation programs that protect the Great Lakes and support a healthy farm economy.

## Coordinate Federal Programs and Manage Information

### Provide effective leadership to guide Great Lakes investments and ensure accountability and efficiency.

The Great Lakes Commission calls on federal agencies to manage and share data and information to guide investments and measure progress toward common goals for the Great Lakes. This includes support for the Blue Accounting initiative, which the Commission is implementing together with The Nature Conservancy to allow Great Lakes leaders to track investments and assess progress toward desired outcomes for environmental, economic and social priorities. The federal government should maintain structures to strengthen dialogue and decision-making across agencies and to coordinate with state and local initiatives. This includes the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force to coordinate federal agency actions; a Great Lakes Advisory Board to provide recommendations from nonfederal stakeholders; an Action Plan to strategically target restoration efforts and measure progress; and annual reports to Congress to ensure accountability.

**PHOTOS Cover:** Niagara Falls at the border of Ontario and New York, ©shutterstock. **Previous page, top to bottom:** boy drinking water, ©shutterstock; the bulk carrier *Alpena* in the Soo Locks, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, ©Doug Herdman; Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Michigan City, Indiana, ©flickr/Oak Ridge Photography. **This page, top to bottom:** silver carp (a variety of Asian carp) in the Fox River in Illinois, ©U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ryan Hagerty; aerial view of harmful algal blooms in western Lake Erie on September 26, 2017, ©NASA Earth Observatory, Joshua Stevens, using Landsat data from the U.S. Geological Survey; Blue Accounting Rubik's Cube, ©The Nature Conservancy, Michael Jordan. **Back page:** Split Rock Lighthouse on Lake Superior in Two Harbors, Minnesota, ©flickr/Anita Ritenour.





## ***Voices from the Great Lakes***

The Great Lakes provide traditionally significant resources such as drinking water, fisheries, and wild rice to the Fond du Lac Band and other Anishinaabeg (Native American) communities. Protecting and restoring the health of the Great Lakes is essential in maintaining the traditional way of life for thousands of Anishinaabeg in the region.

**Hon. Kevin Dupuis Sr., Eshpabid (Chairman), Reservation Business Committee,  
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**

Lake Erie is Ohio's premier natural, economic and recreational resource, and as a state we are tackling Lake Erie water quality issues more aggressively than ever before. While important progress has been made in recent years, there is much more work to be done. Ohio has spent more than \$2.5 billion in the Lake Erie watershed since 2011, and we are committed to working with our federal, state and provincial partners to ensure continued progress.

**Hon. John R. Kasich, Governor, State of Ohio**

The Great Lakes, especially Lake Michigan, are the strongest economic driver for the City of Sheboygan. Sheboygan's waterfront generates approximately \$10 million annually for our local economy. Completing the cleanup of the Sheboygan River Area of Concern in 2013 has led to additional reinvestment in our community and restored a vital natural resource that this community will enjoy for generations to come.

**Hon. Mike Vandersteen, Mayor, City of Sheboygan**

Great Lakes ports are a vital economic engine for their communities and our region as a whole. There's tremendous potential for growth in our maritime economy, but we must address critical challenges such as dredging, maintaining navigation infrastructure, and modernizing port facilities.

**William Friedman, President and CEO, Port of Cleveland**

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River are well positioned to become a major cruise destination, building on the region's natural beauty, vibrant coastal communities, and cultural attractions. Growing the cruising industry is a great opportunity to share the region's beauty with the world while bolstering the tourism economy.

**Bruce Nierenberg, President and CEO, Victory Cruise Lines**



**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, Michigan, 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 and two Canadian provinces, 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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