

April 28, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey, Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger:

We urge you to include the attached critical Great Lakes investments in any economic stimulus response to the devastating coronavirus pandemic. The eight-state, binational Great Lakes Basin is an economic engine for North America, contains more than 90% of our nation's fresh water and supports vital industries such as automotive production, power generation, agriculture, maritime transportation, tourism and recreation.

**With nearly one-third of U.S. and Canadian economies centered around the Great Lakes Basin, revitalizing the Great Lakes economy will accelerate and stabilize our national recovery.**

The Great Lakes Commission convenes the states and provinces—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Ontario, Pennsylvania, Québec and Wisconsin—to speak collectively for a healthy, vibrant Great Lakes Basin. Established by the Great Lakes Basin Compact and authorized by Congress, the Commission promotes, plans for, and invests in the use, development and conservation of the Great Lakes Basin.

The investments below reflect longstanding priorities for strengthening the economic and environmental health of the eight-state region. They are aligned with the [Great Lakes 2020: Vision for a Healthy and Resilient Great Lakes Basin](#). These priorities reflect well-documented needs and enjoy broad support among state and local leaders, business and industry and the conservation community. In most cases, Congressional funding is authorized and can be administered quickly through existing programs.

**These investments will swiftly generate new jobs and economic activity in multiple sectors and respond to existing needs across the Great Lakes Basin.**

Congress has been a vital partner in efforts to maximize the Great Lakes as an environmental and economic asset for the region, the nation and North America. These investments will address important priorities while quickly stimulating economic activity in hard-hit communities. We urge you to fund these needed investments.

If you have questions, please contact us at 734.396.6060 or [dnichols@glc.org](mailto:dnichols@glc.org).

Sincerely,



Sharon M. Jackson  
Chair



Darren J. Nichols  
Executive Director

cc: Members of the Senate Great Lakes delegation  
Great Lakes Commission

### 1. Safeguard Drinking Water and Modernize Clean Water Infrastructure

Great Lakes states face a \$10 billion annual need to maintain and upgrade drinking water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure – nearly 30% of the national need. While the Basin provides drinking water for 48 million people, drinking water crises in Flint, MI, and Toledo, OH show that Great Lakes water supplies remain

vulnerable. Water rates have increased dramatically in Great Lake cities as utilities address crumbling infrastructure, often with decreasing populations of ratepayers. In the six largest U.S. cities on the Great Lakes, at least 367,740 shutoff notices have been issued in the past decade. ***Investing in water infrastructure will address longstanding needs while creating jobs, protecting public health and strengthening local economies.***

*Request:*

- Increase funding for the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Program, and programs authorized in America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 and the Water Infrastructure Improvement for the Nation Act of 2016.

## **2. Fully fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative**

The highly successful GLRI program is generating on-the-ground improvements in communities across the Great Lakes Basin. With significant work remaining, Great Lakes states and local communities are developing restoration projects that can be implemented quickly. For example, U.S. EPA is developing 21 large-scale contaminated sediment remediation projects in six states, requiring approximately \$363 million under the GLRI and leveraging another \$243 million. Funding is also needed to prevent the introduction of Asian carp and implement agricultural conservation practices to prevent harmful algal blooms. GLRI funding creates jobs for contractors and other businesses while stimulating economic development. ***Every dollar invested in the GLRI is projected to generate more than three dollars in additional economic activity.***

*Request:*

- Provide up to \$475 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to accelerate cleanup, restoration and economic development in coastal communities.

## **3. Strengthen the Great Lakes Navigation System**

The Great Lakes Navigation System is a vital component of our regional economic infrastructure that generates more than 237,000 jobs and adds \$35 billion to the U.S. and Canadian economies. It is critical for the U.S. industrial base, with nearly 100% of the iron ore needed for U.S. steel production passing through the Soo Locks. The system faces serious maintenance needs due to years of inadequate investment, including nearly \$9 billion in unspent revenue from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. The investments below will create jobs and modernize an important sector of our regional economy. Requested funds may require multiple fiscal years to deploy. ***These investments have been authorized by Congress and enjoy strong Basin support.***

*Requests:*

- Provide \$789 million for construction of a new Soo lock to maintain the most efficient implementation schedule for this important project.
- Provide \$190 million to complete the Soo Lock Asset Renewal Program to ensure the reliability of the existing locks.
- Provide \$470 million from unspent revenue in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund to address the backlog in dredging and maintenance of navigation infrastructure in the Great Lakes Basin.
- Provide \$162 million for construction of a new heavy icebreaker to support the Great Lakes maritime transportation system.
- Provide \$1 billion for the Maritime Administration's Port Infrastructure Development Grant program to improve the safety, efficiency, reliability and resilience of our nation's ports, including in the Great Lakes Basin.
- Provide \$10 million to support the modernization of ballast water treatment systems and improve efficiency and environmental performance on U.S. flag vessels.

## **4. Protect Against Invasive Species**

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are one of the most significant threats to the environmental and economic health of the Great Lakes Basin. Progress is being made to reduce threats and restore damage from species already

introduced. Yet, the region remains vulnerable to new introductions and spread from various pathways and changes in climate patterns. *AIS prevention and control are top priorities for regional leaders.*

*Requests:*

- Provide \$30 million for preliminary engineering and design at the Brandon Road Lock and Dam.
- Provide \$5 million to the Great Lakes Commission, authorized in the 2018 Vessel Incidental Discharge Act (VIDA), to develop ballast water regulations that are binationally compatible and reflect the unique ecological and economic needs of the Great Lakes Basin.
- Provide \$25 million for the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain Invasive Species Program authorized in VIDA, including funds for Basin coordination on invasive species management.

## **5. Promote Agricultural Conservation**

Federal investment in agricultural conservation practices is critical to protect water quality, enhance wildlife, and support a strong farm economy. Harmful algal blooms are a persistent threat to public health, drinking water and local recreational economies, particularly in vulnerable areas like Western Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay and Green Bay. For example, Lake Erie has experienced significant algal blooms in 7 of the last 10 years. Farmers face extremely difficult conditions due to global market and climate impacts. Federal support for conservation programs provides farmers with resources to sustain their operations and protect water quality.

*Request:*

- Fund programs that support the farm economy, conservation programs and economic assistance for farmers harmed by extreme weather, changes in agricultural practices, and other impacts.

## **6. Build a Resilient Great Lakes Basin Environment and Economy**

The Great Lakes Basin faces challenges from a wide range of changes in the global economy, innovations in technology and transportation, changing populations and communities, aging infrastructure, and variability in weather, precipitation and lake levels. The Commission urges coordination, policies and investments that *protect and enhance a productive, durable, and resilient Great Lakes Basin now and for future generations.*

*Requests:*

- Provide \$10 million for the Army Corps of Engineers Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study.
- Provide \$100 million to FEMA to work with states and tribal governments to establish revolving loan funds for local governments to carry out projects that reduce natural disaster risk, including shoreline erosion and high and/or rising water levels. This would implement the Safeguarding Tomorrow through Ongoing Risk Mitigation (STORM) Act of 2020 (S. 3418, H.R.3779).

## **7. Invest in a Collaborative, Data-Driven Approach to Basinwide Decision-Making**

Federal agencies must manage and share data and information to guide investments and measure progress toward common goals across the Great Lakes. Congress and the administration should support the Blue Accounting initiative to *track investments and progress toward desired outcomes for environmental, economic and social priorities for the binational Great Lakes Basin.*

*Request:*

- Invest in the Great Lakes Commission's capacity to convene the Great Lakes states and provinces under authorities in the Great Lakes Basin Compact to track outcomes from investments in the Great Lakes Basin economy and environment. Build on the Blue Accounting Program to convene consistent, shared data, and ensure investments are resilient to future conditions and impacts.