



May 12, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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 Chairs Shelby and Lowey, and Ranking Members Leahy and Granger:

We urge you to invest in the Great Lakes to help our region and nation recover from the devastating coronavirus pandemic. Thus far, Congress has rightly focused on providing help where it is needed most: people impacted by this disease, including critically needed financial support for employers of all kinds impacted by current stay-at-home guidelines.

As you move forward with legislation to stimulate longer-term economic recovery, we ask that you include investments that put people to work across the Great Lakes Basin. These priorities respond to well-documented needs, enjoy broad support and are proven to create jobs. Funding can be administered quickly through existing programs and swiftly generate job growth and new economic activity across the eight-state Great Lakes Basin. Environmental improvements, including ensuring safe drinking water for over 40 million people, will accelerate community recovery and revitalize the Great Lakes Basin economy while fueling the national economic recovery.

These investments reflect key priorities for Great Lakes states, state legislators, localities, tribes, conservation organizations, labor, businesses, and Great Lakes ports:

1. Safeguard Drinking Water, Modernize Clean Water Infrastructure and Address the Crisis in Water Access and Affordability

The eight Great Lakes states face a \$10 billion annual need to maintain and upgrade drinking water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure – nearly 30 percent of the national need. The Great Lakes provide drinking water for over 30 million Americans. However, the drinking water crises in Flint, Michigan, and Toledo, Ohio, show that Great Lakes Basin water supplies remain vulnerable. Water rates have increased dramatically in many 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 for generations to come.* For example, U.S. EPA recently announced that financing administered under the WIFIA program has created more than 15,000 jobs.

Requests:

- 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.
- Support flexible financing for utilities and ensure affordability and community benefits for ratepayers, including the use of grants rather than loans for economically disadvantaged communities.
- Ensure that infrastructure funding prioritizes green infrastructure and other resilient solutions to address stormwater runoff and achieve water quality, habitat, and invasive species control benefits.

2. Create Jobs by Helping Communities Strengthen Resilience to Increasingly Variable Lake Levels, Climate Impacts, and other Challenges

Communities across the Great Lakes Basin are heavily impacted by erosion, flooding and other effects from high lake levels and extreme weather events. Because lake levels are at all-time highs, these impacts are expected to continue. At the same time, weather events are becoming more frequent and severe, compounding the effects of fluctuating lake levels, which were at record lows less than a decade ago. However, existing FEMA programs do not address projects related to sustained high-water levels and shoreline erosion. This comes at a time when state and local resources for mitigation and adaptation are diminished due to the current economic shutdown. Investments in resilience will enable the Great Lakes states and localities to prepare for, respond to and build resilience to current and future impacts from high lake levels and severe weather events. This will address an urgent need for which other resources are not available. ***Investments in this area have high rates of job creation and have an excellent return on investment for taxpayers. Investments in resilience and mitigation are estimated to pay back to the taxpayer more than \$6.00 for every \$1.00 spent and create 39 jobs per \$1 million spent.***

Requests:

- Provide funding for Great Lakes states and localities to respond to damaging coastal erosion, flooding and other impacts from historically high lake levels and extreme weather events. This funding, on the order of hundreds of millions of dollars, can be administered through existing programs managed by FEMA, NOAA, the Army Corps of Engineers or other federal agencies.
- Provide \$10 million for the Army Corps of Engineers Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study.

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 percent 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. The amounts requested represent the estimated total need and may require several fiscal years to deploy. However, ***these investments are all ongoing projects that have been authorized by Congress and enjoy strong support*** from regional leaders.

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.

4. Invest in the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

The highly successful GLRI program generates on-the-ground improvements in communities across the Great Lakes Basin. Significant work remains and the Great Lakes states, Tribes and localities are developing restoration projects that can be implemented quickly. For example, state and local partners have developed 21 large-scale contaminated sediment remediation projects, in Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin, that require approximately \$363 million under the GLRI and will leverage an estimated \$243 million from nonfederal sources. Funding is also needed for other priorities, such as preventing the introduction of Asian carp and implementing agricultural conservation practices to prevent harmful algal blooms. Funding for the GLRI will create jobs among contractors and other businesses while stimulating economic development in waterfront areas. *Every dollar invested in the GLRI will generate three to more than four dollars in additional economic activity.*

Request:

- Provide a minimum of \$320 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to accelerate cleanup, restoration and economic development in coastal communities.
- Provide additional, accelerated funding for “ready to launch” projects currently in the pipeline for future years, such as restoration projects related to the Areas of Concern.
- Include additional resources for U.S. EPA and the Great Lakes states to effectively manage the funding and adequate time for it to be administered to restoration projects.

Together these investments address important Basin-wide priorities while quickly stimulating economic activity in hard-hit communities throughout the eight-state region. They are also part of broader priorities – attached for your reference – that our agencies and organizations have endorsed for investing in the Great Lakes as a national environmental treasure and economic asset. We also welcome and encourage investments in agricultural conservation and aquatic invasive species prevention as part of an economic stimulus package.

Restoring and protecting the Great Lakes Basin is an enduring, bipartisan priority for the nation and for our communities. We appreciate your support and stand ready to assist in efforts to accelerate our nation’s recovery from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Respectfully Submitted:

Great Lakes Commission	Great Lakes Fishery Commission	Healing Our Waters – Great Lakes Coalition	Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative	Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority
American Great Lakes Ports Association	Great Lakes Metro Chambers Coalition	Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus	BlueGreen Alliance	