



Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition

August 3, 2015

The Honorable Shaun Donovan
Director, Office of Management and Budget
Executive Office of the President
Washington, DC 20503

Via Facsimile: 202-395-3888

Dear Director Donovan:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to ask that you assure the President's fiscal year 2017 budget provides funding for Great Lakes restoration priorities. The Great Lakes region has received much-needed support, and we are seeing on-the-ground results in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. However, while pressures on the U.S. budget will not diminish, neither do the urgent problems facing the Great Lakes if we cut restoration funds. Serious problems only get worse and the price we pay will be much higher.

First, we ask you to support \$300 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). Restoration efforts are improving the lives of millions of people and work is underway or completed on over 2,500 restoration projects throughout the region that are benefitting communities while addressing the most urgent threats to the Great Lakes. These projects are cleaning up drinking water flowing to millions of homes and thousands of industries and improving infrastructure important for future economic growth in the eight-state region. These projects are delivering results throughout, including:

- Two Areas of Concern – Deer Lake, Mich. and White Lake, Mich. – were delisted last year. The Presque Isle, Pa., Area of Concern was delisted in 2013. The management actions necessary for delisting Waukegan Harbor, Ill., Sheboygan Harbor, Wis., and the Ashtabula River, Ohio, have also been completed. The GLRI has accelerated the cleanup of toxic hotspots by delisting three formerly contaminated sites—in the previous two decades before the GLRI, only one site had been delisted.
- Between 2010 and 2014, 52 beneficial use impairments (BUIs) at 13 AOCs were removed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, more than tripling the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years. More BUIs have been removed since the GLRI began than between 1987 and 2009.
- From 2004 to 2009, the Great Lakes region was the only area in the country to show a gain in wetland acreage. Now the GLRI is building on that foundation with a goal to restore one million acres in the basin. So far, the FWS, NPS, NRCS, and NOAA (among others) have restored, protected, or enhanced over 115,000 acres of wetlands and other habitat.
- More than 250 dams and barriers were removed, allowing fish to access more than 3,400 miles of river.

Second, we urge you to provide \$1.45 billion for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF), which is the same level as what was appropriated for fiscal year 2015. The GLRI does not address aging sewers that led to nearly 20 billion gallons of sewage being discharged into the Great Lakes in 2011, closing beaches, threatening public health and damaging local economies. Communities depend on the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) for low-interest loans to implement costly wastewater

infrastructure projects to stop sewage overflows. Based on a fixed formula, maintaining funding for the Clean Water SRF will provide over \$500 million for the eight Great Lakes states in 2015.

Third, the threat of Asian carp is real and persistent. To keep Asian carp out of the Great Lakes we support advancing interim, protective measures that 1) lead to a long-term solution that prevents the inter-basin transfer of AIS between both the Mississippi River and Great Lakes basins, 2) maintain or enhance water quality, recreation, and flood protection, and 3) enable the efficient movement of goods in the region. To achieve these goals, we ask that you provide at least \$3 million to the Army Corps of Engineers for the ongoing Great Lakes-Mississippi River Interbasin Feasibility Study, specifically to quicken the finalization of the study focusing on Brandon Road lock and dam. We need a design for a new engineered channel and control technologies at this site so our region can move forward quickly with constructing the next line of defense against the transfer of invasive species between the two basins.

Lastly, urban and agricultural runoff continue to contribute to the problems facing the Great Lakes. Experts say harmful new algal blooms are being fueled by excessive amounts of phosphorus washing into the lakes from farms, urban areas, and municipal sewage treatment facilities. Stronger storms driven by climate change contribute to the problem, as do invasive mussels. New blooms close beaches, kill fish, impact local drinking water supplies (such as in Toledo, Ohio last year), and harm small, local businesses like charter boats. The harmful algal blooms are spreading farther and faster and beginning earlier than ever before.

To help the region respond to these algal blooms, we ask that you provide continued strong support for Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program. This new program is well placed to fund targeted, discrete conservation practices that will improve soil quality, water quality or quantity, or wildlife habitat in regions such as the Great Lakes. It sets aside conservation funding to encourage innovative partnerships between watershed groups and farmers. As partners, these organizations and farmers work together to further the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife, and other natural resources on a regional or watershed scale. It also provides for accountability by linking the projects to local efforts or other regional initiatives (like the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative).

Support for the RCPP will not be enough to reduce algae-feeding phosphorus in the region's waterways. If we are to achieve 40 percent nutrient reductions in Western Lake Erie (as proposed by the region's governors and International Joint Commission), for example, we will need a much more coordinated response. We ask that the President's budget make room for both a federal coordinator whose job is focused solely on ensuring that federal resources are being targeted in the highest priority watersheds and that there is a robust and comprehensive monitoring plan in place to ensure accountability and results.

These investments in Great Lakes restoration create short-term jobs and lead to long-term economic benefits for the Great Lakes states and the country. A Brookings Institution report shows that every \$1 invested in Great Lakes restoration generates at least \$2 in return, making Great Lakes restoration one of the best investments in the federal budget. More recent research from Grand Valley State University suggests that the return on investment for certain projects may be closer to 6-to-1. The University of Michigan has also demonstrated that over 1.5 million jobs are dependent on clean and healthy Great Lakes, accounting for more than \$60 billion in wages annually. We have also seen jobs being created by our nation's efforts to clean up the Great Lakes and restore fish and wildlife habitat. These jobs include wetland scientists, electricians, engineers, landscape architects, plumbers, truck drivers and many others.

However, there is still much work that needs to be done. Aging sewers, invasive species, and toxic pollutants are just a few of the pervasive threats that impact the region, endangering human and wildlife health, lowering property values, and hurting the region's economy. Cutting funding will slow restoration efforts, allowing problems to get worse and more expensive to solve. Ultimately, cutting spending on the Great Lakes won't save money—it will cost the nation more. As the source of drinking water for 30 million people, the nation cannot afford to stop protecting and restoring the Great Lakes.

Now is not the time to scale back our nation's commitment to restore the Great Lakes environment and economy. We were disappointed that the administration chose to cut such a successful program in this year's budget request. Progress is being made. If we wait and allow restoration efforts to slow, however, the serious problems facing the Great Lakes will only get worse and the price we pay will be much higher. For the economy and the environment, please make sure that the fiscal year 2017 budget provides at least \$300 million for the GLRI, SRF funding is maintained at \$1.45 billion, \$3 million for Asian carp prevention, and resources for the RCPP.

If you have questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact our policy director, Chad Lord, at 202-454-3385 or clord@npca.org.

Sincerely,

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