



November XX, 2022

Director Shalanda Young,

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition and XX of our member organizations, we write to urge the Administration fully fund the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) at no less than \$425 million in the President's Fiscal Year 2024 Budget request.

The Great Lakes define our region's way of life, serving as the drinking water source for more than 42 million people and providing a rich aquatic habitat supporting a \$7 billion annual fishing industry and Great Lakes recreation that draws millions of tourists who boost the economies of our communities. In short, the Great Lakes are where many millions of people live, work and play.

We applaud the Administration's leadership and commitment to Great Lakes restoration. With the Administration's support, the Great Lakes are set to see a much needed boost in funding over the next 5 years as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law invests \$1 billion to accelerate the clean-up of dangerous toxic hotspots found across our communities. These resources will supplement GLRI's efforts yielding significant on-the-ground results across Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. The GLRI is improving the lives of millions of people and work is underway or completed on more than 6,850 restoration projects throughout the region. These projects are benefiting communities by cleaning up the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans. Because of GLRI investments, since 2010 we have seen impressive results:

- Five Areas of Concern – Presque Isle, Pa.; Deer Lake, Mich.; White Lake, Mich.; Lower Menominee River, Mich. & Wisc.; and Ashtabula River, OH. – have been delisted since the GLRI began. The management actions necessary to delist 10 additional AOCs have also been completed. In the previous two decades before the GLRI, only one AOC had been cleaned up.
- 103 beneficial use impairments (BUIs) were addressed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin under the GLRI, ten times the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years.
- Combined with other funding, farmers have implemented nutrient management actions on over 2 million acres of rural lands reducing erosion and farm runoff that feeds toxic algal outbreaks. GLRI funding is helping increase farmland under conservation to reduce projected phosphorus runoff by over 2 million pounds and developing urban runoff projects that have captured more than 375 million gallons of untreated urban runoff.
- Over 6,000 river miles have been cleared of dams and barriers resulting in fish swimming into stretches of river where they have been absent for decades. More than 460,000 acres of habitat have been protected, restored, or enhanced.

These investments create jobs and lead to long-term economic benefits for the region. It is estimated that for every \$1 the GLRI invested to clean up toxic hot spots in Areas of Concern (AOC), control invasive species, restore wildlife habitat, protect wetlands, and reduce harmful algae more than \$3 in additional economic activity resulted regionwide. The GLRI is revitalizing our waterfronts and leading a resurgence in water-based outdoor recreation, increasing tourism across the region.

However, the Great Lakes still face urgent problems, and much work needs to be done. Dwindling habitat, invasive species, and toxic pollutants threaten the region, endangering public health, wildlife, and hurting the region's economy. Moreover, emerging contaminants and a changing climate continue to exacerbate the challenges we face, many of which disproportionately impact people that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice. Allowing these problems to get worse will only put our communities at risk and make them more expensive to solve.

We urge the Administration continue to prioritize the Great Lakes region, ensuring supplemental funds are quickly and equitably distributed to the communities most in need and support EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office staffing needs. Moreover, the Administration must ensure supplemental funds do not replace the GLRI's base funding. We call on the Biden Administration to continue the federal commitment to the region by requesting full funding for the GLRI at \$425 million in FY2024 as called for in the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2019.

As the source of drinking water for over 42 million people and the heart of our regional economy, the nation cannot afford to stop protecting and restoring the Great Lakes. The region stands ready to continue this important federal partnership, ensuring that all benefit from and enjoy these investments in restoration and protection.

If you have questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact our Coalition's Senior Legislative Analyst, Alexis Lopez-Cepero, at alopez-cepero@npca.org.

Sincerely,