



August 28, 2023

The Honorable Michael Regan  
Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency  
Chair, Federal Great Lakes Interagency Task Force  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Administrator Regan:

We write to you as chair of the Federal Great Lakes Interagency Task Force regarding updates to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative's (GLRI) FY 2025-2029 Action Plan. As members of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we urge the Task Force to consider three principles to ensure the program remains successful for the next five years. Even as the Task Force's Regional Working Group prepares a draft new plan, we ask you to reconvene the Task Force to endorse the following:

- Accelerate progress on restoring and protecting the Great Lakes as a source of drinking water for over thirty million Americans.
- Prioritize restoration in the places facing the greatest threats and harms, such as habitat loss in rural areas or renewing waterfront access for historically underserved communities in or near cleaned up Areas of Concern.
- Support projects that are both climate friendly and prepare the region for the climate impacts that we cannot avoid, like protecting and restoring wetlands and addressing stormwater runoff from farm fields and neighborhoods across the region.

We believe that the Task Force has an opportunity to make a strong program even stronger, and that strategic updates to the next Great Lakes Action Plan will benefit millions of people in the region, especially those most impacted by pollution and environmental harm. These updates track with the administration's commitment to confront the climate crisis and reverse environmental injustices – and will put the region on track to continue making progress for years to come.

The GLRI continues to be an extraordinary success that is unique, bipartisan, and rooted in a strong consensus of regional restoration priorities that transcends two decades. Targeted funding is being invested in cleanup of Areas of Concern, mitigation of nonpoint source pollution, prevention and control of invasive species, habitat restoration, and youth education. The GLRI has funded research and monitoring that informs current solutions and outlines problems yet to be solved. The program also enjoys broad support in the region. It thrives in the eight Great Lakes states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, and has bi-partisan support in Washington, D.C. The GLRI is producing results for the environment and economy in local communities and across the region.

While we have seen tremendous results in restoring and protecting the Great Lakes region over the past twenty years, many long-standing problems remain and new threats that can overwhelm our progress have emerged that require sustained attention and funding. Threats of increased flooding, coastal erosion, toxic pollution like PFAS, unequal access to funds in both urban and rural communities, and a lack of community engagement require a renewed focus. The Great Lakes restoration community itself is also

more diverse as communities most impacted by pollution expand the movement to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

The Action Plans have not kept up with these changes. To bring our principles to life, we need the next plan:

- To prepare the region for climate change like protecting, acquiring, or restoring wetlands in an environment with fewer federal protections for them, creating more upstream stormwater storage that prevents downstream flooding, and engaging our communities in the delivery and care of these restored systems.
- To focus on the communities in our region that have historically been impacted by pollution, as well as the communities that will face the greatest future risks.
- To center restoration of a climate-resilient Great Lakes region that meets the needs of all communities alike while measurably address environmental injustices and the cumulative impacts of environmental harm that are connected to degradation of the lakes.
- To provide a refreshed scientific understanding of the ecological condition of the lakes relative to twenty years ago and set strategic metrics for evaluating whether ecosystem restoration progress is happening under Action Plan IV and beyond.
- To prioritize resources for long-term community engagement, including resources to community representatives to offer feedback and hold decision-makers accountable, as well as funding to ensure that agencies are staffed to support meaningful and authentic engagement with local communities.

This renewed focus requires the Task Force—established under Executive Order 13340 and authorizing you as its chair—to recommit to where the regional needs for Great Lakes restoration now are most urgent. It means intentional inclusion of the voices that were not present for the creation of the priorities that have driven Great Lakes spending decisions. It requires an explicit acknowledgement that the region's climate is different and our approach to restoring the drinking water source for thirty million Americans must change.

Our Coalition submitted suggestions for the next Action Plan to the Great Lakes National Program Office and Debra Shore as the Great Lakes National Program Manager, on Thursday, June 22, on how to accomplish these goals. A copy of those recommendations is attached. The Coalition spent six months in a deliberative process with our diverse membership developing these proposed changes. We believe they help the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force measure how the new plan accelerates progress, becomes more community-centered, and addresses climate impacts we cannot avoid.

We deeply appreciate the time and attention Task Force members give to the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes. We are seeing results from this sustained federal commitment to the over thirty million Americans that get their drinking water from the largest source of surface freshwater on the planet. Our nation's inland freshwater seas have benefited from everyone coming together to accomplish our goal of healthy lakes for all.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to Chad Lord, the HOW Coalition's policy director at [clord@npca.org](mailto:clord@npca.org) or 202.257.4365 with any questions.

Sincerely,