



June 4, 2025

The Honorable Andy Harris
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Harris and Ranking Member Bishop:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition and our 74 undersigned member organizations and partners, we write to urge you to support robust funding for Great Lakes restoration in the Fiscal Year 2026 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

We are grateful for the much-needed support the region has received in recent years. We are seeing on-the-ground results because of the investments in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and the region's federally recognized Tribes. However, the Great Lakes still face many urgent threats, that if unaddressed will only get worse, and the price we pay will be much higher if Congress fails to strengthen its federal partnership with the region.

First, we ask that you support the critical broad-based USDA Conservation programs that are the foundation upon which the success of Great Lakes restoration efforts are built. These Farm Bill programs are critical to addressing the ongoing challenge of urban and agricultural runoff and its impact on water quality and public health. Toxic algal blooms are being fueled by excessive amounts of animal waste and fertilizer washing off farm fields and into the rivers and lakes, including the Great Lakes, regionwide. Stronger storms and more frequent flood events, driven by climate change, contribute to the problem, further exacerbated by invasive mussels that have changed how nutrients impact the lakes.

Toxic algal blooms close beaches, kill fish, impact local drinking water supplies (like Toledo, Ohio, in 2014), and when water supplies are contaminated, the most vulnerable members of the community are the first to be impacted. Toxic algae also harm local businesses, by harming local fisheries, curtailing outdoor recreational opportunities, and driving down tourism. With blooms spreading farther and faster and beginning earlier than ever before, we must act to protect communities from this growing threat.

To help the region support its farmers, protect its waters, and respond to these algal blooms we ask you to maintain full funding for the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Farm Bill conservation programs, providing at least \$300 million for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

The RCPP is well placed to fund targeted conservation practices that will improve soil quality, water quality, and 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 and

sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife habitat, and other natural resources on a regional or watershed scale.

Though, support for the RCPP alone will not be enough to reduce algae-feeding phosphorus in the region's waterways. We ask that Congress provide all Farm Bill conservation programs with funding at authorized levels and provide robust discretionary funding in support of NRCS field staff, as technical assistance is essential for the delivery of conservation support for farmers across the region.

We have been very concerned with the Administration's recent actions to cut key staff capacity and funding at NRCS, cutting back programs and eliminating thousands of field staff on the ground working hand in hand with our farmers. These staff are critical partners with Great Lakes states, cities, industries, Tribes, and non-governmental organizations. Our region will fall short of our restoration goals if the federal agencies that are vital partners in our restoration efforts do not have the resources to confront this growing threat. Moreover, if we are to achieve 40 percent nutrient reductions in Western Lake Erie (as agreed to by the region's governors and the U.S. and Canadian governments) we will need a much more coordinated response.

Second, we ask the Committee to support Great Lakes restoration and protection efforts. The USDA is a critical partner in Great Lakes restoration and protection, operating key conservation and regional investment programs that enhance the effectiveness of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). The GLRI is improving the lives of millions of people and has seen efforts undertaken or completed on more than 8,100 restoration projects throughout the region. Efforts through Farm Bill conservation programs -- in partnership with the GLRI -- have seen farmers receive technical and financial support to implement nutrient management actions on 2.15 million acres of farmland projected to reduce over 2.8 million pounds of phosphorus runoff in Great Lakes priority watersheds. These projects are benefiting communities by improving farming practices and cleaning up waters that are the drinking source for millions of homes and thousands of industries.

Still much work needs to be done. Algal blooms, invasive species, and toxic pollutants threaten the region, endangering wildlife and public health, lowering property values, and hurting the region's economy. Moreover, emerging contaminants and a changing climate continue to exacerbate the challenges we face, such as flooding and runoff pollution. Many of these serious threats disproportionately impact people that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice. Cutting staff capacity and program funding will only serve to make these problems worse, put our communities at risk, and make them more expensive to solve.

Progress is being made, and the region stands ready to continue this important federal partnership. We urge Congress to ensure that the fiscal year 2026 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies appropriations bill fully funds USDA farm bill conservation programs.

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

Sincerely,

Alliance for the Great Lakes
Between the Waters
Beyond Nuclear

Bridges//Puentes Justice Collective of the
Southeast
Bright Neighborhood CDC
Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper

Citizens Campaign for the Environment
Clean Wisconsin
Climate Reality Project
Clinton River Watershed Council
Conservation Resource Alliance
Council of the Great Lakes Region
East Michigan Environmental Action
Council
Elevate
Elliott Donnelley Chapter of Trout
Unlimited (Chicago)
Environmental Law & Policy Center
Erie County (NY) Federation of Sportsman's
Clubs
For Love of Water (FLOW)
Friends of Euclid Creek
Friends of the Detroit River
Friends of the Rouge
Friends of the St. Clair River
Genesee Valley Audubon Society
Great Lakes Business Network
GreenLatinos
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC
Hoosier Environmental Council
Huron Pines
Huron River Watershed Council
Illinois Division Izaak Walton League
Illinois Environmental Council
Indiana Sportsmen Roundtable
Junction Coalition
Lake Superior Watershed Conservancy
Michigan Climate Action Network
Michigan League of Conservation Voters

Michigan Trout Unlimited
Milwaukee Estuary Area of Concern
Community Advisory Committee
Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Milwaukee Water Commons
Minnesota Environmental Partnership
National Museum of the Great Lakes
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
NYS Council Trout Unlimited
Ohio Conservation Federation
Ohio Environmental Council
Onondaga Audubon
Partners for Clean Streams
PennFuture
Religious Coalition for the Great Lakes
Sanctuary Farms
Saugatuck Dunes Coastal Alliance
Save Our Water
Save the Dunes
Save The River
Shedd Aquarium
Sierra Club
The Conservation Fund
The Michigan Forest Association
The Stewardship Network
The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay
The Wetlands Initiative
Three Waters Pipeline Resistance Team
Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council
Trout Unlimited Chapter 589
Trout Unlimited Great Lakes Workgroup
Washtenaw County Conservation District

Water You Fighting For?

We the People of Detroit

Western NY Trout Unlimited Chapter 068

Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited

Wisdom Institute

Zero Waste Detroit