



June 6, 2025

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related
Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Grace Meng
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related
Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Meng:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition and our 78 undersigned member organizations and partners, we write to urge you to support robust funding for Great Lakes restoration in the Fiscal Year 2026 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

We are grateful for the much needed support the region has received in recent years, critically supplemented by funds provided under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58). We are seeing on-the-ground results because of the investments in communities across 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 are gravely concerned by the Administrations recent actions cutting NOAA staff capacity, delaying grants, and eliminating or hampering critical life-saving forecasting and research functions communities across the Great Lakes region and the nation rely on. NOAA is an important federal partner in our region through its habitat restoration efforts under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), toxic algal bloom research and forecasting, marine debris monitoring, and investments in community and coastal resilience. Its leadership and partnership are essential, without which our Great Lakes restoration and protection efforts would fall short of our communities' needs and goals. Congress must reaffirm its support for NOAA, rejecting the Administration's executed and proposed staff cuts, ongoing grant delays, and proposed elimination of NOAA research offices. Offices that are critical to Great Lakes restoration, community resilience, and public safety.

Second, we urge the Subcommittee to support Great Lakes science and restoration by providing robust funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), fully funding critical programs and enhancing the agency's staffing capacity. Advancing legislation that supports the:

- Great Lakes Environmental Research Lab, a NOAA regional center for innovative research that is critical in developing coastal forecast systems and toxic algal bloom forecasting, informing the restoration and management of sustainable ecosystems and

resilient communities. We urge the subcommittee to support this work by providing no less than \$40 million in funding for NOAA Laboratories and Cooperative Institutes.

- Great Lakes Observing System, NOAA's Integrated Ocean Observing System regional Observation network, a core component of the information infrastructure critical to safe navigation across the Lakes and response to toxic spills, storms, and other coastal hazards. We urge the subcommittee to provide no less than \$56 million for the Integrated Ocean Observing System Regional Observations

Third, the growing threat of toxic algal blooms is of great concern to the region. New blooms are being fueled by excessive amounts of phosphorus washing into the lakes from urban and agricultural runoff. Moreover, stronger storms and more frequent flooding driven by climate change contribute to the problem. These harmful 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. The Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act program empowers NOAA to work collaboratively with research partners to engage with this threat in the Great Lakes. Research seeks to use an integrated approach to understand the ecosystem dynamics and environmental drivers of these blooms to improve prediction and mitigation strategies. Harmful algal blooms are spreading farther and faster and beginning earlier than ever before and we must act to protect communities from this growing threat. We urge Congress to fund NOAA's activities by providing at least \$42 million for Competitive Research grants.

Fourth, we also urge Congress to continue supporting the other programs and partnerships that collaboratively support and enhance regional and nationwide resilience and restoration efforts. These include the:

- Sanctuaries and Marine Protected Areas program which underpins Great Lakes protection through a web of marine protected areas, including the Thunder Bay and Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuaries. We urge Congress to provide no less than \$87 million for the program.
- Sea Grant College program provides for a federal partnership with academic and research institutions to educate and inform the public on maintaining resilient communities and economies, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, healthy coastal ecosystems, and promoting environmental literacy and workforce development. We support no less than \$147.5 million for the program.
- Coastal Zone Management Grants which are critical in supporting the participation of underfunded state agencies in the Coastal Zone Management Program that brings about coordination between state and federal regulators for the restoration and responsible development of our coastal communities and resources. We urge Congress appropriate no less than \$108.5 million for the grant program.
- National Oceans and Coastal Security Fund which provides grants for the expansion and restoration of natural systems in areas that will both increase protection for communities from coastal storms, lake-level changes, flooding, and coastal erosion while improving critical fish and wildlife habitats. We urge Congress appropriate no less than \$34 million for the grant program.

- Marine Debris Program that coordinates regional efforts for the prevention, research, monitoring, emergency response, and removal of debris, an effort that benefits coastal habitats, wildlife, and protects the public who use our region's waterways. We support no less than \$20 million for the program.

Fifth, we ask the Committee to support the efforts of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). NOAA is one of the critical contributing partners to the GLRI, an agency that is supplemented and enhanced by the GLRI and provides critical research capacity for the Great Lakes Region. The initiative 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. Projects that are benefiting communities by cleaning up waters that are the drinking source for millions of homes and thousands of industries.

Investments in Great Lakes restoration create jobs and lead to long-term economic benefits for the region and the country. 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 the investment will produce more than \$3 in additional economic activity regionwide over 20 years. The GLRI is revitalizing our waterfronts and leading a resurgence in water-based outdoor recreation, increasing tourism across the region.

Still much work needs to be done. A changing climate, habitat loss, invasive species, and toxic pollutants threaten the region, endangering wildlife and public health, lowering property values, and hurting the region's economy. Threats that all too often disproportionately impact communities 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 Subcommittee fully fund NOAA and its critical Great Lakes restoration, community resilience, and climate science programs in the Fiscal Year 2026 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

As the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans and the heart of our regional economy, the Great Lakes region needs the nation's protection and restoration. 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 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
Faith in Place
For Love of Water (FLOW)
Freshwater Future
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
Great Lakes Observing System
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 Microplastics Coalition
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
Restore America's Estuaries
Sanctuary Farms
Saugatuck Dunes Coastal Alliance
Save Our Water
Save the Dunes
Save The River
Shedd Aquarium
Sierra Club
Surfrider Foundation
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
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