



June 6, 2025

The Honorable Mike Simpson  
Chairman  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition and our 79 undersigned member organizations and partners, we write to urge you to support robust funding for Great Lakes restoration and clean water priorities in the Fiscal Year 2026 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

We are grateful to Congress for the much needed support the region has received in recent years. Federal investments are restoring the lakes, our communities, and protecting drinking water across Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and the region's federally recognized Tribes. However, the Great Lakes, and the communities that rely on them, still face many urgent problems as legacy pollutants persist, toxic algal blooms close our beaches, well-known contaminants like lead continue to make drinking water unsafe and unaffordable, emerging contaminants like PFAS are being uncovered, and more frequent flooding overwhelms aging infrastructure threatening our most vulnerable communities.

As we faced these threats in the region, the funding cuts advanced in FY2024 and continued in FY2025 were of great concern. Cuts that slowed progress in the region and have been amplified by the Administration's irresponsible evisceration of core EPA and DOI functions with a further set of staffing reductions and funding cuts being proposed in the Administration's FY2026 request. Those actions already undertaken and those being discussed in this fiscal year for EPA and DOI will only serve to exacerbate these threats, harming Great Lakes communities and our regional economy. These challenges will only get worse as a federal retreat hamstringing communities across the region, and the price we pay will only rise unless Congress rejects these cuts and strengthens its commitment to clean water in the region and across the nation through robust appropriations in FY2026.

First, we ask you to support at least \$475 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), as authorized for FY2026 by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-294) signed into law by President Trump. Restoration efforts are improving the lives of millions of people and work is underway or completed on more than 8,100 restoration projects throughout the region. These projects are benefiting communities, strengthening their resilience to climate impacts and cleaning up the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans. Because of GLRI investments, we are seeing impressive results:

- 6 Areas of Concern (AOC), the most polluted rivers and harbors in the region – Presque Isle, PA; Deer Lake, MI; White Lake, MI; Lower Menominee River, MI & WI; Ashtabula River, OH; Rochester Embayment, NY – have been delisted since the GLRI began. The management actions necessary to delist 9 additional AOCs have also been completed. Prior to the GLRI, only one AOC had been cleaned up.
- 118 beneficial use impairments (BUIs), a benchmark of environmental harm that characterizes AOCs, have been addressed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin under the GLRI, over 11 times the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years.
- Vital support for the early detection, monitoring, and regional response to address the threat of new and existing aquatic invasive species, including invasive carp has been provided. Invasive species control activities have been implemented on more than 250,000 acres in coordinated efforts with federal, state, and local partners.
- 2.15 million farmland acres in priority watersheds have received technical and financial support, in partnership with other programs, to implement nutrient management actions. Conservation efforts across the Great Lakes have resulted in a projected reduction of 2.8 million pounds of phosphorus runoff, a major contributor to toxic algal blooms.
- 8,170 river miles have been cleared of dams and barriers resulting in fish swimming into stretches of river where they have been absent for decades and increasing biodiversity and water quality overall.
- Habitat and wildlife connectivity continue to improve as the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration worked with partners to restore, protect, or enhance nearly 530,000 acres of habitat, including 72,000 acres of coastal wetlands.

Second, we ask you to assert Congress' Constitutional responsibility to direct the Administration to effectively expend appropriated funds and to properly staff agencies to do the critical work our communities, region, and our nation need to protect public health and restore our Great Lakes. Congress must support the agencies essential to implementing Great Lakes restoration through robust topline funding for the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, and others. Rejecting the requested cuts put forth in the President's budget and the irresponsible evisceration of key federal offices that threaten these agencies efficiency and effectiveness.

Supporting funding and effective staffing levels is vital not only for on-the-ground investments but for building agency capacity to effectively implement programs, advance critical scientific investigations, and enhance community support. For too long, agencies have been under resourced, impacting their ability to effectively engage with states and communities who have long felt the economic impacts of environmental harm. We must invest in our federal commitment to ensure the economic and public health of our communities are protected and that our most under resourced communities directly benefit from these programs.

Third, we ask you to support the continued investment in key Great Lakes programs that are the foundation upon which the success of the GLRI is built. We urge Congress to support the:

- Great Lakes Science Center, a U.S. Geological Survey operated facility essential to ecosystem and fisheries management and research, at \$15 million in the new fiscal year.

- Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act grant program, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service program that enhances cooperative conservation and regional habitat restoration efforts, at \$8 million in the new fiscal year.

Fourth, the ongoing damage of current invasive species and potential impacts of future aquatic invasive species, like invasive carp, is real and persistent in our region. We urge Congress to provide:

- \$50 million in dedicated funding for the establishment of the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain Invasive Species Monitoring program as authorized (P.L. 115-282).
- Full funding for programs to keep invasive carp out of the Great Lakes, supporting all actions taken as part of the Invasive Carp Action, including:
  - \$35 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to continue leading monitoring efforts and implementing control and eradication tools and techniques.
  - \$15 million for the U.S. Geological Survey to fund further research into early detection practices and control technologies critical to slowing and responding to the range expansion of invasive carp to the basin.

Fifth, the Great Lakes region is facing a water infrastructure crisis that impacts the drinking water and the health of local communities. Grappling with crumbling and unsafe drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, our communities need a staggering \$279 billion over 20 years to improve, upgrade, and repair drinking water and wastewater systems. This work is increasingly unaffordable, as costs are too often being passed on to those who can least afford it, with water utility bills doubling or tripling over the last decade in many cities.

As we enter the final year of supplemental funding under the historic Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; P.L. 117-58), Congress must again reaffirm that this supplemental funding must enhance and not supplant annual investments by providing robust water infrastructure funding in FY2026. The IIJA's supplemental funds are boosting on-the-ground investments and benefiting communities across the country; protecting public health and advancing important infrastructure upgrades to enhance community resilience, reduce maintenance and operational costs, and create good-paying local jobs.

Congress must provide robust annual appropriations to build upon and sustain the key programs that communities depend on for financing to implement costly, but critical, wastewater and drinking water infrastructure projects. We urge support for:

- \$4.89 billion for EPA's Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF), as authorized.
- \$4.38 billion for EPA's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF), as authorized.
- Providing greater granting and matching flexibility, ensuring states prioritize investments in the most vulnerable communities with up to 40 percent being available for grants
- Continuing the 20 percent green infrastructure set-aside under the CWSRF to promote the further adoption of resilient and cost-effective natural infrastructure solutions.

Moreover, challenges such as lead drinking water pipes and sewer overflows pouring millions of gallons of raw sewage into the Great Lakes threaten the health of families. These grants will directly help localities finance and sustainably address the threat of sewer overflows,

polluted stormwater runoff to our waterways, and lead in our drinking water. We ask the Subcommittee support:

- \$140 million for EPA's Small and Disadvantaged Communities Grant program, as authorized.
- \$50 million for EPA's Household Decentralized Wastewater Systems Grant program, as authorized.
- \$280 million for the EPA Sec. 221 Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grant program, as authorized.
- \$200 million for EPA's Reducing Lead in Drinking Water Program.

In addition, an array of grant programs administered by the EPA support thousands of federally funded positions in state agencies that have the delegated responsibility to enforce critical laws like the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. These funds ensure states have the ability to develop and operate their water quality standards, NPDES permit systems, and nonpoint source management programs. All programs critical to public health, clean drinking water, and ecosystem protection. We urge Congress support:

- \$500 million for EPA Sec. 106 Water Pollution Control Grants program.
- \$200 million for EPA's Sec. 319 Nonpoint Source Management Program.

Investments in Great Lakes restoration create jobs and lead to long-term economic benefits for the Great Lakes states and the country. It is estimated that 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 toxic algal blooms produces more than \$3 in economic benefit over 20 years. Moreover, the GLRI is revitalizing our waterfronts and leading to a resurgence in water-based outdoor recreation, increasing tourism across the region.

Still, much work needs to be done. Aging sewers, 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, many of which disproportionately impact people that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice. We need to tackle these serious threats now, otherwise the problems will only get worse and more expensive to solve.

As the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans and the heart of our regional economy, the Great Lakes is not a resource the nation can afford to stop protecting and restoring. It is critical that Congress provide robust funding for Great Lakes restoration and clean water priorities in the Fiscal Year 2026 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. The region stands ready to continue this important federal partnership, ensuring that all benefit from and enjoy these investments in restoration and protection.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have questions regarding this request, please reach out to our Coalition's Senior Program Manager, Alexis Lopez-Cepero ([alopez-cepero@npca.org](mailto: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 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  
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