



ALLIANCE FOR THE GREAT LAKES

ENSURING A LIVING RESOURCE FOR ALL GENERATIONS

Legislative Priorities for the 114th Congress

The Great Lakes hold more than 80 percent of the surface freshwater in North America and span eight states with 10,900 miles of shoreline. The lakes touch the lives of the more than 40 million people who live near them — from providing drinking water to supporting a regional economy that rivals nations.

With the support of Congress, our region has made major progress to restore and protect the Great Lakes for current and future generations. But, much more remains to be done. To that end, we have identified several key priorities for the 114th U.S. Congress that can have an immediate positive impact on the Great Lakes.



Support Existing Invasive Species Regulations

Aquatic invasive species, such as the zebra and quagga mussels, round goby, and spiny water flea, have caused irreparable harm to the Great Lakes. These species cause more than \$200 million in economic damage annually to our region and threaten to undermine progress made by programs such as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

The single largest source of invasions over the last 30 years is the ballast water of oceangoing ships that enter the Great Lakes. For the last four years, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have worked in partnership to develop standards for on-board treatment technologies designed to reduce the risk of invasion. Short of halting the movement of ocean ships into the Great Lakes, the rapid advancement of these regulations is the best short-term defense the Great Lakes have to prevent future aquatic invasive species introductions.

At this time, we do not see a need for legislative action by Congress. EPA should remain in charge of establishing water quality standards and ensuring the achievement of the goals of the Clean Water Act. USCG should continue focusing on certification of technologies for safe and efficient operation, as well as be on the front lines of inspection of vessels. Oceangoing vessels should continue to be required to flush their ballast tanks with ocean water before entering the Great Lakes. The agencies should work in structured collaboration under their existing authorities, with each agency bringing its unique strengths to the task.

Prevent Asian Carp From Reaching the Great Lakes

Invasive Asian carp populations were first detected in the Illinois River in the 1990s. The “environmental DNA” of Asian carp was detected in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS) in 2009 and has been every year since. The establishment of Asian carp and other new aquatic invasive species (AIS) in the Great Lakes would be a catastrophic loss for our region. A collaboration of federal, state and local agencies must implement a comprehensive permanent solution that stops all AIS from moving between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River. The most effective solution to achieve this goal is the restoration of the natural divide between the two waters, but this will take time. In the short term, the Brandon Road Lock and Dam at Joliet, Ill. is a potentially effective location for construction of measures that reduce the risk of movement of Asian carp species towards the Great Lakes.

We support Congress funding the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at \$8 million in FY 2016 for actions related to construction of risk-reduction measures at Brandon Road Lock and Dam. The corps should also describe how such actions will lead to a long-term solution that prevents the movement of all AIS between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River, as directed by Congress in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007.

Invest to Improve Outdated and Failing Wastewater Infrastructure

Clean water in many Great Lakes communities continues to be compromised by sewage and stormwater pollution that results from outdated and failing wastewater infrastructure. More than 70 percent of all combined sewers in the United States are located in the Great Lakes region. Combined sewer overflows result in poorly treated sewage dumped into the lakes during heavy rain events. This foul cocktail closes beaches, directly impacts communities near sewage treatment plants, and adds to the load of pollutants — like phosphorus — that are impacting Lake Erie’s drinking water. The American Society of Civil Engineers’ 2013 Report Card for America’s Infrastructure gave the nation’s aging wastewater system a grade of D-plus. A \$100.6 billion national investment in wastewater infrastructure is needed during the next 20 years to achieve a basic level of functionality. Congress can improve the federal mandate for public notification of sewage overflows and ensure that communities have access to a sustained source of low-interest loan funding for wastewater infrastructure.

We support at least \$1.5 billion in appropriations for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund for FY 2016. We supported the Great Lakes Water Protection Act (S. 571, H.R. 1185) during the 113th Congress and urge reintroduction of similar legislation to establish consistent public notification procedures for sewage overflows, and to set a date certain for the elimination of overflow activity in the Great Lakes.

Fund a Comprehensive Great Lakes Youth Education Program

The NOAA Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) program offers competitive grants for education programs that engage teachers and students in sustained hands-on activities that address academic learning standards. Experiential opportunities like these enrich the traditional formal learning environment, improve student and educator performance, and lead to improved stewardship for the Great Lakes. Unlike other regions in the U.S., the NOAA B-WET program was not able to secure funding for an FY 2015 competition in the Great Lakes region.

Congress should restore funding for a comprehensive Great Lakes hands-on education initiative for FY 2016 and sustain the program for future years.

Fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative at \$300 million and Pass a Congressional Authorization for the Program

For the past five years, bipartisan support for the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) has resulted in unprecedented on-the-ground results in all eight Great Lakes states. The GLRI supports efforts to clean up toxic pollution, restore fish and wildlife habitat, combat invasive species like Asian carp, and prevent polluted runoff from farms and cities.

A Brookings Institution report shows that every \$1 invested in Great Lakes restoration brings a \$2 return in the form of increased fishing, tourism and home values. A study by Grand Valley State University economists found that a Muskegon Lake restoration project is expected to generate a 6-to-1 return on investment. With a proven track record of success, Great Lakes restoration is one of the best returns on the federal dollar in the budget.

As a member of the governance board of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we support the coalition's agenda to fully fund the GLRI in FY 2016 and authorize the GLRI with new legislation during the 114th Congress. To this end, we support the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2015 (H.R. 223), introduced with bi-partisan support by Rep. David Joyce (R-OH), which authorizes the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative at \$300 million annually over the next five years.

Issues to Watch

Nutrient Pollution: Unsafe Drinking Water, Closed Beaches and Dead Zones

Nutrient pollution, which fuels massive harmful algal blooms (HABs), is a critical threat to our drinking water, our region's quality of life and our economic well-being. In August 2014 nearly a half-million people in communities around western Lake Erie experienced drinking water bans ranging from two days to more than a week as a result of toxins in algal blooms. This problem is also entrenched elsewhere in the Great Lakes, such as in Green Bay, Wis. and Saginaw Bay, Mich. Our region is focused on developing an innovative "blue economy" and attracting new talent to the Midwest — but this vision is incompatible with national headlines declaring Great Lakes water unsafe to drink.

In the coming year:

The governors of the western Lake Erie states and the premier of the province of Ontario must commit to creating a Lake Erie free from the unnatural algal blooms that create toxic water and closed beaches.

The Great Lakes states and/or U.S. EPA must adopt clear and measurable targets and standards for phosphorus and nitrogen pollution.

All relevant sources of pollution should contribute to measurable immediate and long-term phosphorus reductions on a level playing field. We must recognize that agricultural runoff is the largest source of phosphorus pollution that causes HABs and reduce that pollution source accordingly.

Crude Oil Transportation

The Great Lakes are a global hub of oil refining. Growing crude oil production in Canada and North Dakota means greater volumes of crude entering the Great Lakes from pipelines at Superior, Wis. To get this crude oil to market, companies are seeking new modes of moving it via rail, pipeline and even by ships on the Great Lakes. The increase in crude oil supply is outpacing our ability to safely move oil around the Great Lakes. Of greatest concern is heavy crude oil that sinks, rather than floats, shortly after exposure to cold freshwater. In late 2013, a company applied for a permit to build a dock in Superior that would have allowed the [loading of heavy crude oil onto vessels](#) for shipment through the Great Lakes. The state of Wisconsin wisely denied that permit and required a complete environmental assessment should the company wish to reapply. [The U.S. Coast Guard acknowledges](#) that there is currently no realistic way to fully clean up an open-water spill of heavy crude oil on the lakes. We thus do not believe it is currently possible to ship this product safely by vessel on the Great Lakes.

Great Lakes members of Congress should undertake a full review of the federal permits, environmental assessments and USCG certifications that would be required prior to the shipment of heavy crude oil by vessel on the Great Lakes.

For more information, contact Joel Brammeier, President and CEO of the Alliance for the Great Lakes, at jbrammeier@greatlakes.org or (312) 445-9727.

From pursuing protective policies to taking action on-the-ground to educating our communities, the Alliance for the Great Lakes works to protect our unique heritage: the Great Lakes. The Alliance is headquartered in Chicago with offices in Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Grand Haven and Milwaukee.