



2017 Federal Priorities

With the support of Congress, the Great Lakes region has made major progress to restore and protect the lakes. But, much more remains to be done.

The Alliance for the Great Lakes has identified key federal priorities for the next two years. The priorities outlined in this document all can have an immediate positive impact on the Great Lakes and the people who call the region home.

Support Existing Invasive Species Regulations

Aquatic invasive species, such as 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 the region.

The single largest source of invasions over the last 30 years is ballast water discharged by oceangoing ships entering the Great Lakes. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are working in partnership to implement ballast water treatment standards designed to reduce the risk of invasion.

The Alliance opposes efforts to weaken ballast water standards such as the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act introduced in the 114th Session. Currently, EPA establishes water quality standards and ensures the achievement of the goals of the Clean Water Act, while the USCG certifies ballast treatment technologies for safe and efficient operation and is on the front lines of vessel inspection. Oceangoing vessels should continue the practice of flushing ballast tanks with ocean water before entering the Great Lakes. This structure, which allows each agency to bring its unique strengths to this issue, should continue.

Prevent Asian Carp from Reaching the Great Lakes

Invasive Asian carp were first detected in the Illinois River in the 1990s and have moved steadily closer to Lake Michigan. Asian carp larvae have been detected less than 50 miles from the lake. The establishment of Asian carp and other new aquatic invasive species (AIS) in the Great Lakes would be a catastrophic loss for the region. Federal, state, and local agencies must work together to implement a permanent two-way solution that stops all AIS from moving between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins. Any long-term solution should be weighed against the most effective solution to achieve this goal, which is the restoration of the natural divide between the two waterways.

Right now, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is completing a Feasibility Study on Brandon Road Lock and Dam at Joliet, Ill. The lock is a logical choke point location to install Asian carp control measures to keep the fish from moving closer to the lake. The Corps will complete this study in 2019 and must move swiftly to construction.

We support federal funding:

- **To complete the U.S. Army Corps' Brandon Road Feasibility Study and authorization of construction immediately upon receiving the final Study,**
 - **To model and study the CAWS hydrology, a necessary first step in developing a long-term plans for control points that prevent the two-way movement of aquatic invasive species, and**
 - **To develop the Aquatic Invasive Species Treatment Lock concept, which would protect the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins while allowing the movement of vessels between them.**
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Invest to Improve Outdated and Failing Drinking Water Infrastructure and Ensure Access to Safe, Affordable Drinking Water

In 2013, The American Society of Civil Engineers gave our nation's drinking water system a "D" saying that much of our drinking water infrastructure is nearing the end of its useful life. Assuming every pipe would need to be replaced, the cost over the coming decades could reach more than \$1 trillion, according to the American Water Works Association. To address this need, significantly more investment is needed.

The Drinking Water State Revolving Fund allows communities to improve outdated and failing drinking water infrastructure. Funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund should be increased dramatically.

Additionally, we support policies that ensure access to safe, clean, affordable drinking water for everyone in the country. We encourage progressive payment systems that support long-term infrastructure investment without crippling low-income households. Agencies should also increase transparency and access to water quality and water infrastructure investment information.

We support federal legislation to:

- **Appropriate at least \$1.5 billion to the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, and**
- **Establish a pilot program that awards grants to eligible low-income households to assist with water and sewage bill repayment like H.R. 4542, the "Low Income Sewer and Water Assistance Program Act" introduced in the last session of Congress.**

Invest to Improve Outdated and Failing Wastewater Infrastructure

More than 70 percent of all combined sewers, which collect both sewage and storm water runoff, in the United States are located in the Great Lakes region. Combined sewer overflows during heavy rain events lead to the dumping of raw or poorly treated sewage into the lakes.

The American Society of Civil Engineers' 2013 Report Card for America's Infrastructure gave the nation's aging wastewater system a "D". Capital investment needs for the nation's wastewater and storm water systems are estimated to total \$298 billion over the next twenty years. Congress must ensure that communities have access to a sustained source of low-interest loan funding for wastewater infrastructure.

The Clean Water State Revolving Fund provides communities with funding for wastewater infrastructure and should be increased.

We support at least \$1.5 billion in appropriations for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund.

Fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative at \$300 Million

For the past seven years, bipartisan support for the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) has resulted in significant 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.

We support the Healing Our Waters – Great Lakes Coalition's legislative agenda, which can be found at www.healthylakes.org, including fully funding the GLRI at \$300 million annually over the next five years.

Preserve the Clean Water Act & U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Budget

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency plays a critical role in safeguarding our nation's water resources. To successfully implement the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, protect public health and keep our water clean, EPA must receive funding commensurate with its critical responsibilities.

The Administration and Congress should:

- **Maintain EPA's current Great Lakes program and enforcement budgets, and**
- **Uphold the Clean Water Act to ensure that progress in restoring the Great Lakes is not undermined by weakening bedrock laws that protect clean water.**

Issues to Watch

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

Nutrient pollution, which fuels massive harmful and at times toxic algal blooms, is a significant threat to the region's drinking water, quality of life and economic well-being. The largest source of nutrient pollution in western Lake Erie, the area most impacted by this pollution, is from farmland runoff. 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 toxic algae. Algal blooms are also a problem in other parts of the Great Lakes including Green Bay, Wisconsin and Saginaw Bay, Michigan.

In the coming year:

- **The US and Canada along with the western Lake Erie states and province will release draft Domestic Action Plans under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. These plans must provide assurances that they achieve the 40% reduction in phosphorus flowing to western Lake Erie committed to by the jurisdictions.**
- **The Great Lakes states and U.S. EPA must adopt clear and measurable targets and standards, including a TMDL (total maximum daily load), for phosphorus and nitrogen pollution for the western Lake Erie basin.**

Crude Oil Transportation

The Great Lakes are a global hub of oil refining. If market conditions improve or tax incentives make it economically advantageous, crude oil production in Canada and North Dakota could expand. This will mean greater volumes of crude moving through the Great Lakes region from the place where pipelines currently enter the region: Superior, Wisconsin.

To get this crude oil to market, companies may seek new modes of moving it via rail, pipeline and even by ships on the Great Lakes. In late 2013, a company applied for a permit to build a dock in Superior, Wisconsin 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 crude oil in some locations on the lakes. As a result, it is not currently possible to ship this product safely by vessel on the Great Lakes.

Great Lakes members of Congress should support a ban on the movement of crude oil by vessel on the Great Lakes and should support efforts to improve regulations of oil transport by rail and pipeline to ensure that communities are protected.

Plastics

Plastic pollution is a problem in the open water, tributaries, and shorelines of the Great Lakes. Plastic debris makes up 77% to 90% of the total shoreline debris collected during the Alliance's Adopt-a-Beach™ and the Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup events.

Last session, Congress passed and President Obama signed into law The Microbead Free Waters Act of 2015 that amended the federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to ban rinse-off cosmetics that contain intentionally-added plastic microbeads. This was an important step in addressing plastic pollution in the Lakes, but it is not enough to solve the problem because microbeads only represent about 16% of the microplastics found in the Great Lakes. The majority of open water plastic is in fragments broken down from larger pieces, while most of tributary microplastic is fibers. **Reducing this pollution will require identifying the root sources of the plastic and then pursuing policy and consumer behavior campaigns that can credibly reduce the amount entering our Great Lakes. The Alliance is working with researchers to determine how we can best address this issue.**

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About the Alliance for the Great Lakes

The Alliance for the Great Lakes works to protect the Great Lakes for today and tomorrow. We involve tens of thousands of people each year in advocacy, volunteering, education, and research to ensure the lakes are healthy and safe for all.

Our staff are headquartered in Chicago, with field offices in Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Grand Haven (Mich.), and Milwaukee. Our Board of Directors represent a wide range of interests and expertise from around the Great Lakes region.

Learn more at www.greatlakes.org or follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.