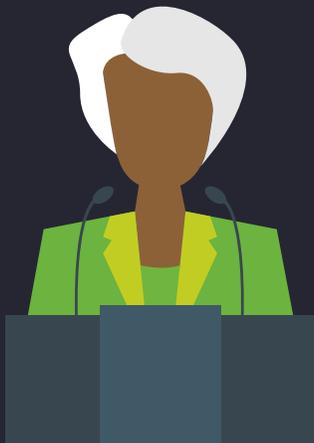


Protect the Great Lakes this Election Season

A Toolkit for Getting Involved



Protect the Great Lakes this Election Season

About this Toolkit

As a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the Alliance for the Great Lakes cannot support or oppose candidates or political parties. However, we can, and do, educate candidates and voters on Great Lakes issues. This toolkit is designed to give you the information and tools you need to be part of the Great Lakes conversation in the 2018 midterm elections.



The Great Lakes face many threats – from invasive species, to failing water infrastructure, to harmful algal blooms. To protect the lakes, we need to defend existing clean water laws while pushing for stronger, better protections for the world's largest source of surface freshwater. But, that can't happen without elected officials at all levels of government who are willing to stand up for the Great Lakes. You can make sure the Great Lakes are part of the agenda.

Federal and state governments have power over the most important Great Lakes issues. These elected officials set program and funding priorities that can lead to better protections for the lakes or leave them more vulnerable to pollution. They can pass legislation that helps or harms clean water protections. They oversee agencies that implement clean water laws and regulations. And they make budget decisions that impact Great Lakes programs.

In 2018, many federal and state offices are on the ballot around the Great Lakes region. Seven of eight governorships are on the ballot, along with eight U.S. Senate seats. And, all seats in the U.S. House of Representatives are up for election in the fall.

The Great Lakes have long enjoyed strong bipartisan support, because people of all backgrounds can see the value of clean water. Right now, we have an opportunity to encourage candidates to stand up for the Great Lakes and hold them accountable once elected. You can have an impact by joining the conversation today.

Protect the Great Lakes this Election Season

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Civic engagement is a critical part of protecting the Great Lakes. Whether it's asking questions at a candidate forum, chiming in on social media, or highlighting water issues in a letter to the editor, raising your voice for clean water is an important way you can help protect the Great Lakes this election season.

Asking all candidates where they stand on Great Lakes issues raises awareness, highlights the issues, and allows us as constituents to hold elected officials accountable once they take office. This toolkit provides you with the information you need to get out and get active this election season.



Key Great Lakes Issues & Sample Candidate Questions



Introduction

While what follows is not a comprehensive list, we've identified some of the most pressing Great Lakes issues below. In this section, you'll find sample questions on each issue area to ask candidates for federal and, in some cases, state elected office. We've also provided a brief background on each topic.

Incorporating your own story when asking questions of candidates for elected office can be powerful. We encourage you to use the information below as a guide and use personal experience to make these questions your own.

Key Great Lakes Issues and Sample Candidate Questions

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Aquatic Invasive Species

Asian carp: Asian carp are an aquatic invasive species that pose a serious threat to the Great Lakes regional economy and ecosystem. Congress authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to study options for preventing the carp from reaching the Great Lakes. The Corps has identified several solutions that would add more protections at Brandon Road Lock and Dam in Joliet, Illinois, to reduce the risk that Asian carp will reach Lake Michigan. Last year, an Asian carp was found past existing electric barriers that are the last line of defense, just nine miles from Lake Michigan, demonstrating the urgency of this issue.

- *If elected, what would you do to keep Asian carp out of the Great Lakes?*
- *How would you ensure that plans to prevent Asian carp from reaching the Great Lakes get implemented quickly?*

For Illinois Candidates: Asian carp are moving up the Illinois and Des Plaines Rivers toward Lake Michigan. Therefore, the state of Illinois has a role to play in keeping Asian carp from reaching the Great Lakes.

- *If elected, what would you do to keep Asian carp out of the Great Lakes?*
- *How would you ensure that plans to prevent Asian carp from reaching the Great Lakes are implemented quickly?*

Key Great Lakes Issues and Sample Candidate Questions

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Ballast water: Aquatic invasive species, such as zebra and quagga mussels, round goby, and spiny water flea, have irreparably harmed the Great Lakes and cause more than \$200 million in damage annually to the region. Ballast water discharged by oceangoing ships entering the Great Lakes is the single largest source of aquatic invasive species. The U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are working in partnership to implement ballast water treatment standards to reduce the risk of invasion.

- *If elected, how would you ensure that the Great Lakes are protected from aquatic invasive species that can be carried into and around the lakes in ships' ballast water?*
- *How would you protect the Great Lakes from new aquatic invasive species and the economic and ecological havoc they cause?*



Water Infrastructure & Funding

Drinking water: In 2017, 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. An estimated \$1 trillion is necessary to repair, replace, and expand drinking water distribution systems over the next 25 years, and another \$30 billion is estimated to replace every lead service line in the country. Current funding levels are not adequate to meet this overwhelming need. Sufficient funding is necessary to support solutions that provide long-term infrastructure investment without crippling low-income households. One such federal program is the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, which provides low-interest loans to communities to improve outdated and failing drinking water infrastructure.

Key Great Lakes Issues and Sample Candidate Questions

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- *If elected, how would you increase funding available to communities to pay for drinking water infrastructure upgrades?*
- *How would you ensure communities are able to improve failing water infrastructure and provide safe, clean, and affordable drinking water to residents without financially burdening economically challenged families?*

For State-Level Candidates:

- *If elected, how would you make state resources available to address outdated and failing drinking water infrastructure?*

Sewage and stormwater runoff: More than 70 percent of all combined sewers, which collect both sewage and stormwater runoff in the United States, are located in the Great Lakes region. During heavy rains, combined sewers overflow, which leads to raw or poorly treated sewage getting into the lakes. The American Society of Civil Engineers' 2017 Report Card for America's Infrastructure gave the nation's aging wastewater system a "D+". Capital investment needs for the nation's wastewater and stormwater systems are estimated to total \$271 billion over the next 25 years. The Clean Water State Revolving Fund provides communities with funding and low-interest loans for wastewater infrastructure improvements.

- *Do you support increased funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund to address outdated and failing wastewater infrastructure?*
- *How would you ensure that funding solutions for economically disadvantaged communities are prioritized through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund?*
- *How would you ensure all communities are able to improve outdated and failing wastewater infrastructure?*
- *Do you support using Clean Water State Revolving Funds to pay for nature-based solutions to reducing stormwater runoff, such as green infrastructure?*

For State-Level Candidates:

- *If elected, how would you make state resources available to address outdated and failing wastewater infrastructure?*
- *Do you support using Clean Water State Revolving Funds to pay for nature-based solutions to reducing stormwater runoff, such as green infrastructure?*

Key Great Lakes Issues and Sample Candidate Questions

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Water Affordability & Safety

Water affordability: In addition to necessary funding streams for infrastructure improvements and repair, funding is needed to protect consumers - particularly among low-income communities with limited resources. Currently, the federal program Low-Income Heat and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) provides aid to families in need to cover heat and energy costs. Water and sewer bills, on average, are even higher than heat and energy bills, yet they have received little attention in federal programs.

- *How would you ensure that low-income households are able to afford their water and sewage bills and avoid having these services cut off?*

Keeping water safe: Water traveling to consumers through lead service lines pose a serious threat to the health and safety of residents around the region. Lead service lines need to be replaced in full, including both publicly and privately owned portions of the line. Without funding for full lead service line replacement, partial lead service line replacement will only exacerbate the problem and heighten the likelihood of lead exposure. What's more, funding is necessary to ensure the cost of these infrastructure improvements does not fall squarely on the rate payer.

- *If elected, what solutions would you propose for lead service line replacement on private property?*
- *If elected, how would you update drinking water laws in your state to improve monitoring of contaminants and address issues related to affordability?*

Key Great Lakes Issues and Sample Candidate Questions

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Agricultural Pollution

Agricultural pollution: Runoff pollution from agricultural lands carries excessive nutrients into our waterways, which fuels harmful and at times toxic algal blooms across the Great Lakes region. This is a significant threat to the region's drinking water, quality of life, and economic well-being. Agriculture is the largest contributor to pollution in western Lake Erie where, in 2014, nearly a half-million people lost access to tap water from two days to more than a week because toxic algae contaminated water sources. Algal blooms are also a problem in other parts of the Great Lakes, including Green Bay, Wisconsin and Saginaw Bay, Michigan.

- *What is not working in current efforts to reduce agricultural pollution, and what would you do differently?*
- *Do you support prioritizing Farm Bill conservation dollars for projects and practices that measurably reduce runoff pollution from agricultural operations?*
- *What would you do to reduce runoff pollution from agricultural lands?*
- *How would you prioritize Farm Bill conservation dollars to reduce runoff pollution?*
- *How will you help the public get accurate information on whether or not pollution is being reduced in your state?*

For Ohio Candidates: Harmful algal blooms directly impact residents surrounding Lake Erie in Ohio each summer by threatening the safety of drinking water, quality of life, and economic well-being for millions of Ohioans. An agreement to reduce this pollution by 40 percent by 2025 has been signed by the Governors of Michigan and Ohio and the Premier of Ontario. Progress has been severely limited, and we have yet to see the policy change needed to achieve a healthy and clean Lake Erie.

Key Great Lakes Issues and Sample Candidate Questions

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- *What is not working in current efforts to reduce agricultural pollution, and what would you do differently?*
- *How would you ensure that the most effective agricultural best management practices are implemented in Ohio?*
- *How will you ensure phosphorus pollution to Lake Erie and all of Ohio's waterways is reduced?*
- *How will you help the public get accurate information on whether and how much progress is being made toward achieving the 40 percent phosphorus reduction goal for western Lake Erie?*



Environmental Protection & Restoring The Great Lakes

GLRI: The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) supports projects to clean up toxic pollution, restore fish and wildlife habitat, combat invasive species like Asian carp, and prevent polluted runoff from farms and cities. It also supports efficient collaborations among federal agencies on critical issues, such as the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee. Full federal funding of the GLRI at \$300 million annually ensures that this work continues and the Great Lakes continue to thrive. Every \$1 invested in restoring the Great Lakes brings an estimated \$2 return in the form of increased fishing, tourism, and home values.

- *Do you support continued full federal funding for the GLRI at \$300 million annually?*
- *How will you ensure that Great Lakes restoration continues?*
- *What priority projects would you like to see funded with GLRI dollars?*

Key Great Lakes Issues and Sample Candidate Questions

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EPA: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency plays a critical federal role in safeguarding our Great Lakes from pollution. To protect public health and keep our water safe and clean, the EPA must receive funding and policy direction that ensures federal Great Lakes efforts do not backslide.

- ***How will you ensure that the Great Lakes and other water resources are protected from pollution?***
- ***How will you ensure that the states and tribes have the resources needed to protect the Great Lakes and other water resources from pollution?***
- ***How will you ensure the EPA is able to continue to support critical Great Lakes programs?***

Raise Your Voice for the Lakes: Four ways you can protect clean water this election season



Now that you're up to speed on key Great Lakes issues and have a bunch of good questions to ask candidates, let's dig into ways for your voice to be heard during the busy election season. It's important to find what works for you. For instance, some people may feel more comfortable writing a letter to the editor, while others may want to interact with candidates directly. No matter what method you use, asking candidates about Great Lakes highlights the issues voters like you care about. And, it encourages candidates to go on the record and be clear about what issues and programs they will and will not support if they are elected to office.

The first step in making an impact is to get informed about races in your community and get registered to vote. There are lots of great resources out there to help you learn who's running, what their positions are, and where you can learn more.

At a Glance: Voter Resources

Find Local Races and Candidates: Ballot Ready and Ballotpedia are two resources you can use to get up to speed.

<https://www.ballotready.org/>

<https://ballotpedia.org/>

Register to Vote: Fill out your voter registration form, find your polling place, and get the voter information you need at Vote411.org.

<http://www.vote411.org/>

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1 Attend a candidate forum

Candidate forums provide an opportunity to engage with individuals running for office and ask important questions about their platforms. Hosts from a range of different backgrounds, such as civic organizations and media outlets, organize candidate forums to provide these opportunities. The format can vary from forum to forum, but they generally allow time for participants from the audience to ask questions of them, whether they are submitted ahead of time or asked right there on the spot. This is an important chance for candidates to share their message and engage the public on their plans to positively impact their community. Candidate forums are also an important way for you to get your issue on the agenda by asking questions about how the candidate plans to take action if elected.

Below are some tips to get you out and asking important questions of candidates in your area.

- **Do your research.** Get to know candidates and their platforms prior to attending a forum, using resources from organizations such as Ballotpedia, and BallotReady as well as candidate websites.
- **Find a forum.** Check with your local media outlets, civic organizations, and chambers of commerce, which regularly organize these events.
- **Know the format.** Forums may be public or private, may accept questions only in advance, and may follow other specific guidelines. Be sure to know the rules before you plan to attend.
- **Ask your question and make it personal.** Keep your questions direct and to the point, giving only as much information as is necessary. Make your question more impactful by sharing why it is personal to you and your community.

2 Write a letter to the editor

Writing a letter to the editor can be an effective tool for reaching a broad audience with your message and position on issues that are important to you. Letters to the editor are published on the editorial page in newspapers, which is one of the most read sections in the paper, and they are often featured on newspaper websites.

*Raise Your Voice for the Lakes:
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Many candidates and their staff also keep tabs on opinion pages to keep in touch with issues of importance to their constituents. In some cases, newspapers or magazines will write their own editorial piece in response to a popular letter to the editor or issue, giving your issue even more publicity. Additionally, news outlets are often partners in candidate forums, and some newspapers issue candidate endorsements. Writing about a particular issue and why you support a particular candidate can be great way to influence your community during election season.

So, how do you write a strong, publishable letter to the editor?

Tips for a strong letter to the editor:

- **Be brief and focused.** Keep it under 200 words, but 150 or less is best.
- **Be relevant.** The most publishable letters will respond to specific articles published by the newspaper or refer to current events in a timely manner. Respond to articles within two or three days of publication.
- **Make it personal.** Why do you care? Tell the editor, and readers, who you are and why the issue matters to you and your community.
- **Make your point and back it up.** Clearly make your point. Use facts to back up your claim.
- **Be direct and make a call to action.** Refer to the legislator, organization, or other entity by name. Be specific about the action you want them to take.
- **Use your own words.** Be original, don't plagiarize, and don't worry about sounding like a subject matter expert. Your opinion and your voice are what matter.
- **Follow directions.** Most publications accept letters to the editor online and have specific instructions for how to submit your letter. Visit the newspaper's opinion page on its website to find instructions or give your newspaper a call to ask.
- **Include your contact information.** Include your name, address, and daytime phone number. Newspapers may want to get in touch with you to verify the letter or if they need to edit it for length.
- **Try, try again.** It's not always easy to get your letter published. So, if at first you don't succeed—try, try again!

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3 Speak up on social media

Social media offers a platform to join the conversation and engage voters and candidates alike on the issues that matter to you. From email to social media to text alerts, information travels quickly and through many different channels. But this can be a double-edged sword. With so much content, it can be a challenge to stand out. When posting on social media, it's important to be clear, concise, and to the point.

Using social media leading up to the election can be a great way to engage with candidates, learn more about their platform, and keep up-to-date on candidate events and news. Many elected officials and candidates have social media accounts to engage with their constituents directly. Social media can also be a great way to follow along with news outlets covering the election, including announcements of interviews, candidate forums, and other election-related news.

Here are a few tips and tricks for effectively communicating your message.

Tips for Effective Social Media Posts

- **Use a #hashtag.** Tapping into trending hashtags – #GreatLakes, #Midterm2018, etc. – is a great way to track a conversation and follow key issues.
- **Be relevant.** Hook your audience and stay relevant to candidates and others in the conversation. Use interesting facts, photos, or links. For example, link to a recent news article, refer to current events in your community, and use relatable material.
- **Keep it simple.** It's great to provide interesting information, but a social media post is not an encyclopedia entry. Get to the point quickly and clearly.
- **Make your ask.** Your posts should make it clear what questions you're asking and what action you want candidates to take.

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- **Follow social media accounts that give you the information you need.** Keeping up with news outlets, issue organizations, and candidates themselves is a great way to stay informed during election season. Understand that different accounts have different goals – from providing information, to influencing opinion, to winning your vote – so read with a critical eye. Find us on Twitter (@A4GL), Instagram (@alliance4greatlakes), and Facebook (Alliance for the Great Lakes).
- **Submit questions for interviews and candidate forums.** Many news outlets will announce requests for question submissions for an upcoming interview or candidate forum.
- **Share your participation in a candidate forum.** If you attend an event, take pictures and tag the candidate using their social media handle. This kind of activity helps spread the word and raise awareness of election season events.

4 Get out the vote for the Great Lakes

So, you've followed along, participated in events, asked questions, and stayed informed on important issues. Now what? It's time to get out and VOTE! Once you've made sure you're registered and ready to vote, it's equally important to make sure friends, family, and other members of your community are registered and ready, too. Below are some tips to get out the vote this election.

- **Register to vote.** Check out your state's voter registration page or www.rockthevote.org for more information on how and where to register to vote and determine your own polling station.
- **Participate in a voter drive.** Check with local civic organizations for information on voter drives and other kinds of assistance available for people looking to vote. Volunteer to help get members of your community registered and to the polls.
- **Encourage friends and family.** Share the information with family, friends, and your community – the more people involved, the better!

Report Back

Thanks for using our toolkit—we'd love to hear how it went! If you attended a candidate forum and asked a Great Lakes question, tell us what questions you asked and how candidates responded. If you wrote a letter to the editor, got active on social media, or helped get out the vote, we're interested to hear what you learned or heard.

Share with us how you got involved to protect the Great Lakes this election season. Use this web page to report back on what you learned: www.GreatLakes.org/2018Midterms



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