

Watermarks



Our Clean Water Agenda

Coming Together to Win



While it’s a bit cliché to talk about spring as a time of rebirth, if there were ever a year that earned the phrase, this is it. Now really does feel like a time for fresh opportunities and rebuilding. Our volunteers are back in action, having hosted dozens of safe cleanup events around the region for our annual April Adopt-a-Beach Spring Kickoff. Our policy priorities in Washington and state capitols around the region are getting a fresh look from elected officials. And we’re all ready to explore the lakes and their shores with family and friends again this summer.

Big challenges face the lakes and the communities that rely on them, and we are here to take them on. That optimism of spring is something we plan to carry through not just the summer, but also into everything we do.

This issue of *Watermarks* discusses how entrenched environmental injustices are harming one Great Lakes community, and the work we have done in deep partnership with local leaders. Remedying these challenges will take time. I’m optimistic because I’ve seen the true leadership of people who are making change happen in their neighborhoods. I’m glad the Alliance has found a way to support local champions. And I’ve seen that the Biden administration and Congress are acknowledging these problems, setting an important tone and direction for federal agencies working on Great Lakes protection.

I’m also optimistic about the renewed interest in investing in repairing our nation’s outdated infrastructure. We have upwards of \$188 billion in need in the Great Lakes states to repair and upgrade our drinking and waste water infrastructure. While there is a lot of work to come this summer and fall, Great Lakes members of Congress have shown their interest in supporting safe and clean water infrastructure as a leading bipartisan priority. And we will be making sure that the Biden administration and Congress follow through on the commitments they’ve made.

We have a busy year ahead! As always, thank you for your support, and for reading.

Joel Brammeier, President & CEO

Our Federal Great Lakes Policy Agenda

Earlier this year, we unveiled our top five federal Great Lakes policy priorities for President Biden’s administration and Congress. Here are our topline policy asks.

Prioritize environmental justice

Environmental justice seeks to address the unfair distribution of pollution and repair the harm that it causes. President Biden should ensure that environmental justice is centered in the work of all federal agencies and decisions that impact the Great Lakes. Congress should reinstate and fund environmental justice programs within the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Increase water infrastructure funding & stop water shutoffs

The eight Great Lakes states need \$188 billion over the next 20 years to fix our water infrastructure. Costs for this work are often not shared equitably. President Biden should propose, and Congress should pass, increased funding – at least \$100 billion over the next 5 years – to fix our failing water systems. The President and Congress should enact and fund programs that stop water shutoffs and support low-income ratepayers.

Fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative & restore and strengthen clean water protections

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funds restoration projects, from wetland restoration to cleaning up toxic hotspots. President Biden and Congress should fully fund the GLRI, strengthen clean water protections, undo harmful regulations and Executive Orders, and increase staffing to strengthen the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and other federal agencies working to protect public health and the environment.

Fund efforts to stop invasive carp

To stop invasive carp, President Biden and Congress should fund pre-construction engineering and design for the Brandon Road Lock & Dam project, a key choke point in the waterways in Illinois. Congress should authorize construction at full federal expense.

Address agricultural pollution that drives harmful algal blooms

Farm Bill conservation programs are critical to addressing water quality problems caused by agriculture. President Biden and Congress should fully fund Farm Bill Conservation Programs, and these should be linked to measurable water-quality improvements.

For full details, and to find updates on our policy agenda, visit www.greatlakes.org/news

Prioritizing Environmental Justice

Databook shines a light on environmental injustices, sets healthier agenda at Lake Michigan’s southern tip.

Chicago’s vibrant Southeast Side is rich in water resources. It’s home to Lake Michigan, Lake Calumet, Big Marsh Nature Preserve, and the Calumet River, which is Chicago’s only free-flowing river connected to Lake Michigan. But the Calumet River corridor is heavily industrialized. Its shoreline is dominated by industry, leaving little access for community members to enjoy the water. The steel mills that once operated here left a legacy of industrial pollution.

For decades, Southeast Side community activists have been fighting to prevent new pollution sources and clean up existing pollution that threatens public health. And they’ve been shining a light on how rivers and the waterfront in their neighborhood, where a majority of residents are Latino and Black, are used, as opposed to waterways on the North Side of Chicago, which is predominantly white. The Southeast Side waterfront is dominated by heavy, polluting industry with little public access, whereas parks and trails are plentiful along Northside waterways with little industrial land use.

Alliance Community Planning Manager, Olga Bautista, a lifelong Southeast Side resident and activist, described the difference in an op-ed for Crain’s

Chicago Business earlier this year. She wrote: “When I visit the North Side, I smell and taste a different air. I see green spaces and river walks. I don’t see factories spewing chemicals next to schools, homes, parks and waterways.”

New Report Highlights Troubling Trends

Bautista leads the Alliance’s Calumet Connect project, a coalition of local organizations working for a healthy future along the Calumet River. The coalition began with listening, which ultimately led to a massive first-of-its-kind report – the *Calumet Connect Databook*.



What is environmental justice?

While we like to think that any work associated with the lakes is colorblind, we know that neither clean water benefits nor the cost of water stresses are equitably shared across communities. Data shows that environmental problems like water pollution, unaffordable water rates and shutoffs, and limited access fall most heavily on communities of color and low-income communities.

When we talk about water benefits and stresses, we are talking about

questions of social and racial justice. Low-income residents, and communities of color in particular, routinely bear the brunt of the water problems - whether it’s the challenge of finding clean water for drinking or bathing children when the tap fails, or when the high cost of water infrastructure upgrades hits lower-income families hardest.

Environmental justice seeks to address this unfair distribution of pollution and repair the harm that it

causes. It requires the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of people of color and low-income communities in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

Social, racial and economic justice are inseparable from environmental justice. We cannot achieve our vision of a Great Lakes enjoyed by all when systemic racism is allowed to permeate our society unchecked.

Steered by Calumet Connect participants, the Databook is the product of more than a year of collaborative research. The report is a comprehensive review of sources of toxic pollution, health outcomes, and quality-of-life standards for the community.

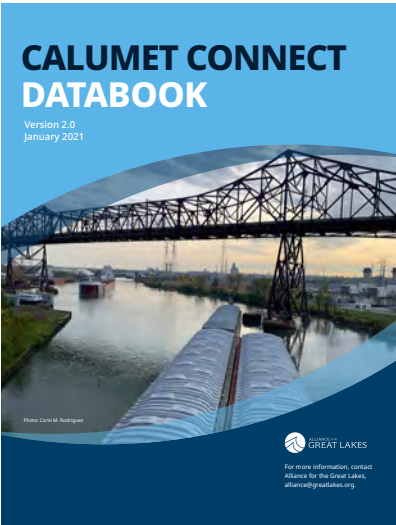
The findings are troubling. Area residents experience higher rates of coronary heart disease compared to the rest of Chicago, and the rate of COPD is also higher than the rest of Chicago. Toxic releases remain at high levels in parts of the study area. And the city’s current and proposed land use and zoning policies are not sufficient for supporting the community’s goals for a healthy and environmentally just Calumet River corridor.

Community at a Crossroads, but Opportunities Abound

“The Databook lays out in stark terms the environmentally unjust policies that have impacted the Calumet region on the Southeast Side of Chicago,” explains Bautista. “But more importantly, it identifies clear opportunities for the City of Chicago to make decisions that can guide sustainable development and protect public health along the Calumet River.”

Now, the community is at a crossroads. The City of Chicago will soon begin work on a new plan to revitalize the Calumet River corridor. The Alliance created the Databook to ensure that the city’s Department of Planning has accurate information to make decisions that can guide sustainable development and protect public health.

In the past, planning for the area has failed to address the public health challenges facing residents. Yet, with thoughtful development and community input, the City has the opportunity to chart a new path for the corridor by including incentives to draw sustainable businesses that create jobs and are protective of the community and the environment. The Databook is step one in this process. To read more and download the report, visit www.greatlakes.org/databook.



“The Databook lays out in stark terms the environmentally unjust policies that have impacted the Calumet region on the Southeast Side of Chicago. But more importantly, it identifies clear opportunities for the City of Chicago to make decisions that can guide sustainable development and protect public health along the Calumet River”

– Olga Bautista, Southeast side resident, community activist, & Alliance Community Planning Manager

THANK YOU Our Calumet Databook Funders & Partners

More than a year in the making, the *Calumet Connect Databook* was a team effort that was made possible by the leadership of people living in Chicago’s Southeast Side neighborhoods. We’re grateful for the community organizations and residents of the Southeast Side, for our partners in gathering and analyzing data, and for our funders who support this work.

LOCAL PARTNERS

- Calumet Connect Partnership Advisory Committee
- Claretian Associates
- Southeast Environmental Task Force
- Southeast Side Coalition to Ban Pet Coke
- Metropolitan Family Services
- Work2gether 4 peace
- Southeast Youth Alliance
- Parents of Extraordinary Children
- Nine3Studios
- Centro De Trabajadores Unidos
- Alliance of the Southeast

RESEARCH PARTNERS

- Metropolitan Planning Council
- Center for Neighborhood Technology
- NeighborSpace
- Great Lakes Integrated Science and Assessment Center
- UI-Chicago, School of Public Health
- UI-Chicago, Voorhees Center

FUNDERS

- The Chicago Community Trust
- Great Lakes Integrated Sciences and Assessment Center
- The JPB Foundation through The Funders Network
- Pisces Foundation

Three Honored with Volunteer of the Year Awards

2020 was a year like no other. But volunteers still showed up in a big way for the Great Lakes.

In late April, the Alliance hosted a virtual celebration to honor everything our volunteers accomplished in 2020, and to announce our Volunteer of the Year Awards.

Volunteers set a powerful example of what it means to protect the Great Lakes. Their efforts create a ripple effect that gives their work even more impact. “Volunteers are visible,” said Alliance President & CEO Joel Brammeier at the event. “People notice what they’re doing. And that visibility is really, really important to the Great Lakes. When one person steps up, the people around them pay attention, and more of those folks step up. Even elected officials and businesses pay attention when they see people working on behalf of the Great Lakes.”

Whether they’re cleaning trash off beaches, speaking to local communities, or raising funds to protect clean water, our volunteers are also building momentum to protect the Great Lakes.

Our 2020 Volunteer of the Year Awardees are:



ALLIANCE AMBASSADOR OF THE YEAR:
Brian O'Neill



**ADOPT-A-BEACH
TEAM LEADER OF THE YEAR:**
Mike Jabot



**YOUNG PROFESSIONAL COUNCIL
VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR:**
Victoria Sullivan

Visit www.greatlakes.org/2020volunteerawards to read about these amazing volunteers, and to hear why they volunteer. Thank you to everyone who volunteers!



Paul Culhane named Director Emeritus

The Alliance for the Great Lakes Board of Directors recently honored Paul Culhane as a Director Emeritus in recognition of his more than 30 years of combined board service to the Alliance and its predecessor, the Lake Michigan Federation.

Paul’s service to the organization over the past four decades is more than any living current or former board member. “Paul’s fervent support for the protection of the Great Lakes, and his depth of knowledge about the lakes, public policy, and organizational management have helped steer the organization through difficult times and into the thriving organization it is today,” said Alliance for the Great Lakes Board Chair Sue Conatser. “We are all deeply grateful for Paul’s service, and are honored to have him as a Director Emeritus.” You can read more about Paul at greatlakes.org.



ALLIANCE *for the*
GREAT LAKES

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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| Lauren Bigelow | Laura Rubin |
| Claire Castleman | <i>Emeritus</i> |
| | Paul Culhane |
| | James Griffith |

IN BRIEF

Great Blue Benefit Goes Virtual

On June 17, Alliance supporters gathered virtually to celebrate clean water and to raise funds for the work to protect the Great Lakes. The event featured keynote speaker Ellen Alberding, President, Joyce Foundation, and special guest Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, along with a variety of featured speakers. If you missed it, be sure to check out the recording on the Alliance’s YouTube channel.

2020 Annual Report: 50 Years ... Forward

Despite everything, the Alliance for the Great Lakes came through 2020 strong. We made significant gains in protecting the Great Lakes, and celebrated our 50th anniversary. Explore our digital annual report, with highlights of the work we accomplished, financial report, donor list, and more at: greatlakes.org/annualreport20.



SAVE THE DATE

September Adopt-A-Beach: Saturday, September 18

Mark your calendars for our annual day of action for the Great Lakes. We’ll be celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Alliance Adopt-a-Beach program. It’s not too late for your business to support Adopt-a-Beach as a 2021 sponsor. Contact Jon Heuring, Foundation & Corporate Giving Manager, at jheuring@greatlakes.org to learn more.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

We’d love your feedback about our Watermarks newsletter. We’re also happy to answer your questions about pressing Great Lakes issues.

Email us at alliance@greatlakes.org.



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Photos in this issue by Lloyd Degrane, Corin M. Rodriguez

A photograph of two women hiking on a wooden boardwalk that runs along a shoreline. The woman in the foreground is wearing a pink shirt and black shorts, and is looking down at her feet. The woman in the background is wearing a black shirt and black shorts, and is looking ahead. The boardwalk is made of wooden planks and is surrounded by lush green trees and vegetation. In the background, a body of water is visible, with waves breaking on a sandy beach. The sky is blue with some white clouds.

The Alliance for the Great Lakes works across the region to protect our most precious resource: the fresh, clean, and natural waters of the Great Lakes.