

Top 5 Great Lakes Federal Policy Priorities for 2024

The Alliance for the Great Lakes has identified the top five opportunities for Congress and federal agencies to address challenges facing the Great Lakes. Equity and justice are embedded throughout these policy priorities. Federal water programs must be fully funded and prioritize communities where the burden of pollution hits hardest. Community voices must be included in Congressional and agency decision-making.



Water Infrastructure

Increase water infrastructure funding, prioritize funding for communities most in need

Based on EPA survey data, the Great Lakes region needs at least \$225.2 billion over the next twenty years to fix failing water infrastructure. Current federal funding programs are not fully funded and will not meet this need. Congress must provide additional funds for water infrastructure, and it must be structured to reach communities with the highest needs.

In 2024, we urge Congress to:

- Increase annual funding to at least \$9.3 billion for the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds and make some of this funding available as grants or forgivable loans to disadvantaged communities
- Increase by \$1 billion annual funding levels for lead service line replacement and emerging contaminants
- Pass a federal ban on water shutoffs
- Establish a federal program to provide financial assistance for water and sewer bills

In 2024 we urge the US Environmental Protection Agency to:

- Provide technical assistance to disadvantaged and underserved communities to ensure full access to water infrastructure funding
- Finalize a Lead and Copper Rule that mandates accelerating the replacement of lead service lines within the next ten years
- Complete and publicize the Clean Water Needs Survey



Agriculture

Pass a Farm Bill that prioritizes clean water

Agriculture is the largest unaddressed source of nonpoint pollution in the Great Lakes region. Runoff from agricultural lands puts the Great Lakes at risk, polluting drinking water, threatening wildlife, and harming the regional economy. In 2024, Congress can pass a Farm Bill that ensures farms produce clean water, not pollution, along with their crops.

In 2024, we urge Congress to pass a Farm Bill that:

- Increases funding for U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs
- Includes provisions to ensure accountability for farm conservation programs aimed at stopping runoff pollution from agricultural lands
- Reduces funding for concentrated animal feeding operations



Plastic Pollution

Pass legislation to stop plastic pollution

Researchers estimate that 22 million pounds of plastic pollution enter the Great Lakes annually. Plastic pollution isn't just an unsightly problem in our waterways. It poses a serious threat to human and wildlife health. Congress has an opportunity to be a leader on reducing plastic pollution.

In 2024, we urge Congress to pass legislation that:

- Makes plastic waste producers responsible for its reduction
- Reduces the use of single-use plastics, including polystyrene foam
- Funds additional research on the public health impact of plastics



Invasive Species

Protect the Great Lakes from aquatic invasive species

Preventing invasive species from entering is the best way to protect the Great Lakes. The battle against invasive species is focused on two fronts – stopping invasive carp from entering the Great Lakes and reducing the threat of the introduction and spread of invasive species by requiring ships to install ballast water treatment systems.

In 2024, we urge Congress to:

- Fund the first phase of construction of the Brandon Road Interbasin Project to stop invasive carp
- Authorize a 100 percent federal cost share for operation, maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, and replacement for the Brandon Road project in the 2024 Water Resources Development Act

In 2024, we urge federal agencies to take the following actions:

- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should continue implementing the Brandon Road project with public participation, finalize the project partnership agreement with Illinois, and initiate the first phase of construction for Brandon Road
- The U.S. EPA should issue rules requiring all vessels operating on the Great Lakes, including lakers, to install ballast water treatment systems



Great Lakes Restoration

Update and fund Great Lakes restoration programs

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) is one of the most important tools in the region's toolbox to protect and restore the lakes. In addition to continued investment in the GLRI, federal agencies should revise the Great Lakes restoration strategy.

In 2024, we urge Congress to:

- Fund the GLRI with at least \$450 million in FY 2025
- Reauthorize the GLRI at a total of \$500 million per year for the next five years (FY 2027-2031)

In 2024 we urge federal agencies to take the following actions:

- The White House and U.S. EPA should update the Great Lakes action plan to address environmental injustice, climate resilience, and the next generation of risks to the Great Lakes
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should include large-scale natural infrastructure in the Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study to address extreme water level changes caused by climate change