

SPEAKING UP:

What questions do you want to ask the candidates?

Asking candidates for any office 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. It also helps you and others in the community understand how candidates would govern if elected.

Here are some issues where elected officials at all levels of government can make a difference. Decide which issues you want to make part of the election-year conversation. Then think of a few key questions you want to ask the candidates. Here are some ideas to get you started:

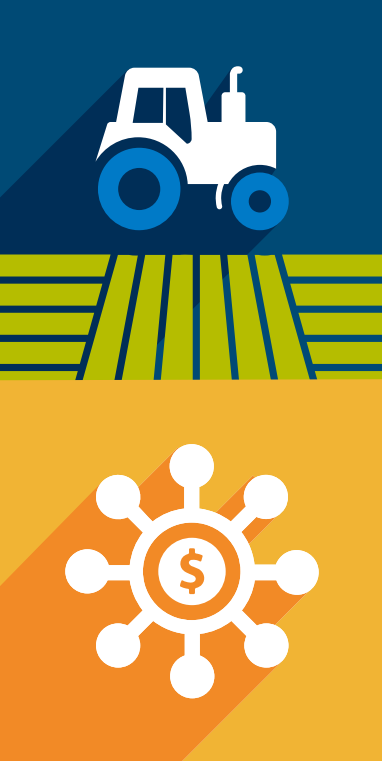
WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

No one should be without clean, safe, affordable drinking water in their home. No one should suffer harm from lead service lines. No one should have to worry about sewage backing up into their basement or chronic community flooding that damages homes, businesses, and community gathering places. Yet communities across the Great Lakes region continue to grapple with antiquated drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater infrastructure. These burdens fall especially hard on disadvantaged communities, who too often experience all these water impacts along with other environmental and socioeconomic harms. And with climate change causing more extreme storms and periods of drought throughout the region, our communities face heightened threats to well-being from inadequate and/or failing water infrastructure.

Sample candidate questions:

- How would you keep our drinking water safe and affordable?
- What is your plan to replace lead drinking water pipes in our state/our community?
- How will you fund much-needed improvements to our drinking water, sewage, and stormwater infrastructure?
- What is your plan to ensure that water infrastructure funding reaches the communities/neighborhoods most in need? Which communities/neighborhoods do you think are most in need of water infrastructure improvements?
- How would you get community input about drinking water, sewage, and stormwater infrastructure needs and improvements?
- Do you support funding for projects that reduce neighborhood flooding and sewage impacts, such as green infrastructure and other solutions for those hit hardest by these threats to people and property?
- How would you decide which water infrastructure improvements to prioritize?
- What laws, policies, and programs would you promote to ensure that our water is safe to drink? That our communities are free from flooding and sewage?





AGRICULTURAL RUNOFF

Nutrient runoff from farm fields fuels a bumper crop of algae, causing harmful algal blooms. These blooms can make water toxic to fish, wildlife, and people; create “dead zones” where fish and other aquatic creatures can’t survive; increase downstream costs for drinking water treatment; harm the regional economy; and prevent people from enjoying recreation on the Great Lakes. In August 2014, an algal bloom in Lake Erie left more than half a million people in Toledo, Ohio, without drinking water for nearly three days.

Sample candidate questions:

- What would you do to reduce nutrient runoff from agricultural lands that pollutes local waters?
 - What standards would you support to reduce agricultural runoff?
 - Most agricultural pollution reduction programs are voluntary. What role does the government play in ensuring that runoff is reduced enough to help our local waters?
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- We’ve spent billions of dollars on voluntary programs to stop agricultural runoff, but there are still harmful algal blooms. What would you do differently to finally address this problem and make better use of taxpayer dollars?
 - How will you help the public get accurate information on whether nutrient pollution is being reduced in our waters?
 - How will you fund programs that reduce agricultural runoff into local waterways?

MAKE IT LOCAL

While federal and state officeholders and agencies have great influence on the health of the Great Lakes, your local mayor, city council members, and state house representatives also have a big impact. They make decisions on issues from local drinking water quality to parks and recreation to your water and sewer bills to reducing plastic pollution that ends up in the lakes.

The key to advocating locally is to connect the dots between the issue you care about, the public institution responsible, and the public officeholder who has the most influence on that institution. For example, if you’re concerned about increasing water and sewer rates, your city’s water department is responsible for setting rates, and your mayor has influence over the water department.

Some quick detective work by searching your local government webpages will describe which officeholders are responsible for the issues you are concerned about this election. After you have identified the local issue you care about and the candidates who are seeking offices that influence that issue, you can use the tips in this guide to connect with them directly.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive species have caused irreparable harm to the Great Lakes ecosystem, and have cost the region billions of dollars since the late 1980s. Preventing new invasives from entering is the best way to protect the Great Lakes. We must stop invasive carp by building structural measures that block their path as they make their way up the Illinois River toward Lake Michigan. And we must treat the water in ships' ballast tanks to prevent ballast water from carrying invasive species from overseas to the lakes and from one Great Lake to another.

Sample candidate questions:

- How will you fund programs and agencies that keep aquatic invasive species from establishing and spreading in our waterways?
- Are there new programs or initiatives that you would support to reduce the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species?
- Studies have shown that ships traveling exclusively on the Great Lakes can spread invasive species in their ballast water. Do you support mandating ballast water treatment for these "Lakers"?



PLASTIC POLLUTION

More than 22 million pounds of plastic pollution end up in the Great Lakes every year. And plastic never really goes away. Instead, it just breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces known as "microplastics." Researchers have found stunningly high amounts of microplastics in all five Great Lakes. They've found microplastics in Great Lakes fish, drinking water, bottled water, and beer. Microplastics have been found in human blood, lungs, stool, and even breast milk.

Sample candidate questions:

- What policies do you support that would reduce waste from single-use plastics in our state/community?
- How would you reduce government purchasing of single-use plastics?
- Do you support bans on the most problematic single-use plastic items, like foam food ware and plastic shopping bags?
- Do you support regulations that allow customers to bring their own refillable containers to grocery stores, beauty care stores, and restaurants?
- How would you hold manufacturers accountable for spilling industrial plastic pellets into our waterways?
- Do you support monitoring our drinking water for microplastics and microfibers?
- Would you support an Extended Producer Responsibility law to reduce packaging waste in our state?

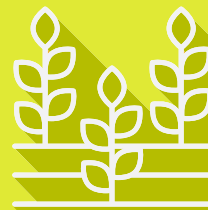


GREAT LAKES RESTORATION

Restoration projects include everything from cleaning up toxic hot spots to restoring wetlands, reducing runoff pollution, protecting native fisheries, and restoring habitat for fish and other wildlife. Funding for these projects can come from federal, state, and local governments. And many government agencies must often work together to make restoration projects happen, from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to your local parks district or forest preserve.

Sample candidate questions:

- How will you fund projects that restore local waterways?
- Which restoration projects would you prioritize?
- How will you ensure that restoration projects help the communities where they're located, and are designed to include benefits like reduced community flooding, more green space, and economic development?
- How would you get community input to guide restoration efforts?
- What would you do to clean up a specific toxic hot spot in our local waters?
- Climate change will cause more extreme high and low water levels along the Great Lakes. What policies do you support to make our shorelines resilient to changing water levels?



OTHER LOCAL ISSUES

Other local water issues may have a big impact on your community. Perhaps decisions need to be made about permits for mining companies, pipelines, or industrial facilities. There may be local beach access issues or plans to store hazardous waste near local waterways. Make sure to ask candidates about the issue that will have the biggest impact on your community.

