



ALLIANCE for the
GREAT LAKES

Spring/Summer 2025

Watermarks

**More Than Water:
A Season of Action
for the Great Lakes**



A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

More Than Water— The Great Lakes Are Home, History, and Hope

The Great Lakes are more than a landmark on a map—they are **the lifeblood of our home**. They provide **drinking water for you and millions more**, sustain **local businesses and industries**, and shape **communities that have thrived along their shores for generations**.

At the Alliance for the Great Lakes, **we fight for these waters every single day**. Because we know that protecting the Great Lakes is not just about the environment—it's about **public health, economic strength, and a shared responsibility to preserve them for future generations**.

A Critical Moment for the Great Lakes

There are rapid changes happening in Washington, D.C., including a big push for cuts to federal water programs that support the Great Lakes. What has not changed is our commitment to our values, and to our belief that every level of government has a critical role to play in clean water protection. Right now, we are facing two moments that underline the stakes:

- **A Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) reauthorization bill has been reintroduced in the U.S. Senate.** GLRI has been one of the most effective conservation programs in the country—with largely federal funding, it has supported over **7,500 restoration projects, removing toxic pollution, restoring habitats, and revitalizing communities**. It delivers **three times its investment in economic benefits**, proving that when we protect the Great Lakes, we strengthen the entire region.

This program needs **full reauthorization and funding, and full support from the White House**, to continue its impact.

- **The Brandon Road Lock and Dam project—our best defense against invasive carp—is under construction but faces potential delay.** The state of Illinois, where the project is located, wants additional assurances from the Trump Administration that future federal funding will be available for the project so that it can be finished. Invasive carp have already taken over parts of the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers, devastating fisheries and disrupting ecosystems.

Every delay increases the risk that they reach the Great Lakes—causing irreversible harm to a \$5.1 billion fishing industry, a \$16 billion recreational boating economy, and the ecological balance of these waters.

Raising Our Voices for the Lakes

In February and March, **members of our team traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with lawmakers and advocate for urgent action on these issues and much more**. They made it clear that protecting the Great Lakes isn't just a local concern—it's a national priority.

But the fight doesn't stop in Washington. It lives in **every person who loves these waters, every business that depends on them, every community that calls them home**.

We need your voice.

Whether you **advocate, volunteer, donate, or simply share why the Great Lakes matter to you**, you are part of this movement.

Our Commitment to the Great Lakes

We are not in a fight to maintain the status quo, but to express the values we share for the Great Lakes and all who rely on them. Indiscriminate funding and staff cuts will make it easier for industry to pollute our drinking water and harder to contain invasive species that threaten our economy, and will chill the scientific expertise that the Great Lakes have relied on for decades. And cuts also have the potential to cause the greatest impact on communities that already bear an unfair burden of pollution. At the Alliance, we remain steadfast in our mission: **to protect, restore, and advocate for these waters**—for today and for the generations to come.

The Great Lakes belong to all of us. **And they are worth every effort to protect.**

Joel Brammeier, President & CEO, Alliance for the Great Lakes

Alliance for the Great Lakes Welcomes New Board Officers



Left to right: **Laura Payne**, **Nicole Chavas**, **Tim Frick**, **David Hackett**

Strong leadership is essential to ensuring a thriving future for the Great Lakes and the communities that rely on them. At the Alliance for the Great Lakes, our board officers play a vital role in guiding the organization's strategy, advocating for clean and accessible water, and championing policies that protect these vital ecosystems.

Following our annual board retreat, we are pleased to announce new leadership that will help drive our mission forward: **Laura Payne** – Chair

Nicole Chavas – Nominations Chair

Tim Frick – Treasurer

David Hackett – Vice Chair for Development

Each of these individuals brings valuable expertise and a passion for safeguarding the Great Lakes. Their leadership

will be instrumental in shaping initiatives that enhance the resilience of the lakes, engage local communities, and advance sustainable solutions for the region.

As we welcome new officers, we also express our deep appreciation for those who have completed their various officer and board terms. Former Chair **Jo-Elle Mogerman**, former Nominations Chair **Tom Langmyer**, and former Vice-Chair for Policy **Vanessa Tey Iosue** were all term-limited last year. Susan McDermott completed her second term as treasurer and remains a valued board member. And we give our best to former member Daniel Guzman King, who stepped down recently to join in service of the U.S. Navy. We thank them all for their dedication and contributions.

Joel Brammeier, the Alliance's President & CEO, expressed his gratitude:

"Leadership transitions are a time of reflection and momentum. We honor those who have served with dedication and welcome new officers who will carry our mission forward, ensuring that the Great Lakes remain a source of clean water, recreation, and natural beauty for all."

For a full list of the Alliance for the Great Lakes Board of Directors, visit our website.

Water Advocacy at the Ohio Statehouse: A Call for Clean Water Policies

On Thursday, January 30, the Alliance for the Great Lakes, alongside our partners—The Nature Conservancy, Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, The Junction Coalition, and the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC)—came together at the Ohio Statehouse to address the state's most pressing water issues. Water Advocacy Day was a powerful opportunity to engage with lawmakers, share policy solutions, and advocate for clean, safe, affordable water for all Ohioans.

During the event, Helena Volzer, the Alliance for the Great Lakes' Senior Source Water Policy Manager, led an insightful presentation on the critical impacts of agricultural pollution. She highlighted how excessive nutrients—especially nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilizers and manure—continue to fuel harmful algal blooms across the Great Lakes, posing serious risks to public health, aquatic ecosystems, and local economies. The financial burden of this pollution is often passed down to communities, increasing drinking water costs and placing an unfair strain on low-income households.

"Agricultural pollution isn't just an environmental issue—it's a public health and economic issue," Volzer emphasized. "If we don't act now, Ohioans will continue to bear the rising water treatment costs while ecosystems suffer."

Ohio ranks second in the nation for the number of lead service lines, and many older homes still contain lead-based plumbing. Efforts are underway to eliminate lead

from drinking water systems, but progress remains slow. Combined with the challenges of harmful algal blooms and agricultural runoff, stronger policies and funding solutions are urgently needed.

Throughout the day, advocates and policy leaders met with state representatives, senators, and aides to push for solutions to prioritize clean water. These discussions emphasized the importance of critical funding for conservation programs such as the H2Ohio program, Ohio's flagship program to address water quality issues including agricultural runoff, household sewage treatment and wastewater infrastructure, wetland creation, and lead service line replacement. The Alliance and its partners urged lawmakers to strengthen policies that hold polluters accountable, increase investment in clean water infrastructure, and ensure water affordability remains a top priority.



L-R: Helena Volzer, Senior Source Water Policy Manager, Alliance for the Great Lakes, Kayla Wilkerson, Director of Budget & Finance, Ohio Senate Democratic Caucus, Kaitlyn May, Policy Advisor, Ohio Senate Democratic Caucus, Scott Stockman, Legal Counsel, Ohio Senate Democratic Caucus, Melanie Houston, Managing Director of Water Policy & Chief of Organizational Planning, Ohio Environmental Council



Action for the Lakes at Every Level of Government

Whether you grew up along the shores of the Great Lakes, moved here for work or school, or simply visit to take in their vast beauty, these waters have a way of becoming a part of you. They are a source of drinking water for millions, a driver of local economies, and a place of recreation, connection, and renewal. But they are also under constant threat.

Pollution, invasive species, aging infrastructure, plastic waste, and agricultural runoff are eroding the health of the Great Lakes and the communities that rely on them. These issues are not new, but the urgency to address them has never been greater.

That's why the Alliance for the Great Lakes is committed to fighting for these waters at all levels of government—not just in Washington, D.C., but in state legislatures, in city councils, and on the shorelines where policy meets action.

A Unified Push at the Federal Level

While the Alliance has a permanent presence in Washington, earlier this year members of our team from the Great Lakes region, including Tom Zimnicki, Agriculture & Restoration Policy Director, Chrystopher L. Garzón Rivera, Water Policy Analyst, Laura Payne, Board Chair, and I traveled to the Capitol. Along with Donald Jodrey, Director of Federal Relations, we met with lawmakers to press for policies and funding that will ensure the Great Lakes remain a vital resource for generations to come. Our message was clear: **Protecting the Great Lakes is not optional. It is essential.**

While in Washington, we participated in summit meetings, strategy discussions with allied organizations, and individual Congressional office visits to demonstrate the strength of the Great Lakes region. We heard firsthand about the uncertainty over whether funding for environmental

programs is being used as Congress intended, and about the pressure from the White House for funding and program cuts. The insights from Washington are guiding our next steps, including exerting bipartisan accountability for Great Lakes programs to push back on unwise cuts. The federal government plays a crucial role in funding and implementing programs that safeguard these waters. While progress has been made, even before the new administration and its push for cutbacks, major gaps remained. That is why our 2025 federal priorities focus on five key areas:

1 Protecting and Restoring the Great Lakes

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has been a cornerstone of cleanup efforts since its inception. This program has funded more than 7,500 restoration projects, removing toxic pollution, revitalizing habitats, and addressing environmental threats across the region. Yet, without continued support, these gains could be lost. Congress must reauthorize and fully fund GLRI to sustain this progress and expand its reach.

2 Stopping the Spread of Invasive Species

Invasive carp are closer than ever to entering the Great Lakes. If they do, they could devastate fisheries, disrupt local economies, and permanently alter the ecosystem. The Brandon Road Lock and Dam project is a critical barrier designed to stop their advance, and work on its construction is now underway using federal and state funds secured for project construction. But delays in funding and construction could threaten its success. Unified federal and state support is needed now to ensure this project moves forward without further obstacles.

3 Strengthening Water Infrastructure

Millions of families across the Great Lakes region rely on outdated and failing water systems. Across the region, lead service lines still pose a direct risk to public health, disproportionately affecting low-income communities. At the same time, sewage overflows and stormwater runoff continue to pollute local waterways. EPA has estimated that the Great Lake states have an estimated \$290 billion in water infrastructure needs over the next 20 years.

Continued and increased federal investment in water infrastructure is critical to ensuring safe, clean drinking water for all.

4 Reducing Agricultural Pollution

Toxic algal blooms, largely fueled by fertilizer runoff from industrial farming, have turned portions of Lake Erie into dangerous zones of contamination. These blooms not only pollute drinking water but also damage local economies that depend on tourism and recreation. Despite years of voluntary programs, pollution levels remain high. Stronger accountability measures and funding for sustainable farming practices are needed to reduce agricultural runoff and protect our waters.

5 Tackling Plastic Pollution

The Great Lakes are inundated with plastic waste, with an estimated 22 million pounds of plastic waste entering the lakes each year. These plastics break down into microplastics, contaminating drinking water and harming aquatic life. State action on plastic pollution varies and is not addressing the root cause of this problem. Federal action is needed to hold manufacturers accountable, reduce single-use plastics, and fund research into the long-term impacts of plastic pollution.

Taking the Fight to the State and Local Levels

While federal action is critical, many of the most pressing threats to the Great Lakes must also be addressed at the state and local levels. In Ohio, we are working with lawmakers to pass the Lead Line Replacement Act, which would remove toxic lead pipes from drinking water systems statewide. In Michigan, we are advocating for stronger protections against agricultural runoff, a leading cause of toxic algal blooms in Lake Erie. This includes expanding water quality monitoring efforts and pushing for targeted conservation funding to reduce nutrient pollution at its source. By prioritizing science-based solutions and collaboration, we are driving meaningful change for Michigan's waterways and the communities that depend on them.

L-R: Jason Wilhite, Patagonia, Brenda Santoyo, Illinois Water Justice Coalition member, and Water Justice Program Manager at the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO), Ann Mesnikoff, Environmental Law and Policy Center, Maggie Jones, Donald Jodrey, Director of Federal Relations at Alliance for the Great Lakes, Iyanna Simba, Illinois Water Justice Coalition member, and City Programs Director at the Illinois Environmental Council.

State governments also play a vital role in enforcing clean water laws, funding infrastructure improvements, and ensuring that communities have the resources needed to respond to emerging environmental threats. But these efforts often lack sufficient funding or political backing. By working with local advocates and policymakers, we are ensuring that Great Lakes protections remain a priority at every level of government.

A Movement Begins at the Shoreline

For all the work being done in legislative halls and courtrooms, some of the most impactful change happens directly on the shores of the Great Lakes. Each year, thousands of volunteers participate in the Adopt-a-Beach program, removing litter, collecting data, and raising awareness about pollution.

Last year alone, these volunteers held 925 cleanups on all five Great Lakes and removed 23,560 pounds of waste from beaches and waterways, preventing plastic, cigarette butts, and other pollutants from reaching the open water. Their work is a reminder that individual actions, when multiplied across communities, create meaningful change.

How You Can Get Involved

The fight for the Great Lakes is not just a policy debate—it is a collective responsibility.

- **Contact your representatives.** Urge them to support full funding for GLRI and the Brandon Road project.
- **Support state and local legislation.** Whether it's water infrastructure improvements or pollution controls, local action matters.
- **Join a cleanup.** The Adopt-a-Beach program and other volunteer opportunities provide hands-on ways to protect our lakes.

A Shared Responsibility

The Great Lakes are not just a natural resource; they are a legacy. They sustain economies, provide drinking water, and define the identities of millions. We are joining with partners across our great region to send a clear message to Washington—the Great Lakes need champions, not cutbacks. Our communities need clean water, and our work is far from done.

Learn more about our Federal Priorities and take action at greatlakes.org.



Shaw's® CRAB HOUSE

40 Years of Freshness, Flavor, and a Commitment to the Great Lakes



For 22 years, Shaw's has been a proud partner of the Alliance for the Great Lakes and a key contributor to our annual Great Blue Benefit. In fact, Shaw's was there from the very beginning—hosting the very first event in 2003 at its downtown Chicago location, where it has been a beloved fixture of the Loop for the past four decades. Back then, the Alliance was still called the Lake Michigan Federation, and the event was known as the Taste of the Great Lakes. But one thing has remained the same: Shaw's commitment to fresh, responsibly sourced Great Lakes seafood and the belief that protecting these waters means protecting the ingredients, communities, and traditions that make its menu possible.

Since opening its doors in **1984**, Shaw's has done things differently. It's not just a restaurant—it's a relationship builder, working closely with **fishing families, oyster growers, and sustainable fisheries** to bring the freshest seafood to its guests.

As Midwesterners, we should all work to protect the fresh, clean, and natural waters of the Great Lakes. For many years Shaw's Crab House has been aligned in that goal with The Alliance for the Great Lakes, and we hope that we can continue to do so for years to come," said Bill Nevruz, Executive Partner and Divisional President of Shaw's.

That dedication is reflected in every dish, from Norwegian King crab legs and Maryland-Style crab cakes to Lake Erie yellow perch and freshly shucked oysters—each prepared with a deep respect for the ingredient and the environment it comes from.

But Shaw's impact goes beyond what's on the plate. Its commitment to responsible sourcing stems from a deep belief that protecting natural resources today means stronger communities, thriving industries, and a more sustainable food system for generations to come.

"Shaw's has been committed to a healthy and well-managed seafood stock around the country. We have supported organizations on the coast and also the Great Lakes to ensure there will be seafood for future generations. This will continue to be an issue that needs to be addressed, and Shaw's is committed to being a voice for healthy fish management," said Steve LaHaie, Opening General Manager and Operating Partner at Shaw's for more than three decades.

Forty years in, Shaw's is still setting the standard. Still leading. Still innovating. Still serving. And for those who love seafood, tradition, and the waters that make it all possible—Shaw's will always feel like home.

Join Us at the Great Blue Benefit

You can experience Shaw's commitment to fresh, sustainable seafood firsthand at the Great Blue Benefit on Thursday, June 12, 2025, at the Columbia Yacht Club. Join us for an unforgettable evening celebrating the Great Lakes, featuring incredible food, great company, and a shared commitment to protecting our waters.

Reserve your spot today! Early bird tickets are available until April 30:
greatlakes.org/benefit.

Interested in **sponsorship opportunities?**

Contact **Genevieve Fletcher** at gletcher@greatlakes.org or 312-445-9736 to learn how you or your business can support clean water initiatives while gaining visibility at one of Chicago's premier conservation events. Sponsor now at greatlakes.org/sponsor.



IN BRIEF

SAVE THE DATE

April 25, 2025

Adopt-a-Beach Spring Kick Off Friday

Thursday, June 12, 2025

Great Blue Benefit



Saturday, September 20, 2025

September Adopt-a-Beach



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



The Alliance for the Great Lakes is a nonpartisan nonprofit working across the region to protect our most precious resource: the fresh, clean, and natural waters of the Great Lakes.

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A photograph of a long, narrow pier with a metal grate floor and blue railings, extending from a rocky shore into a calm lake. The sun is setting on the horizon, creating a warm orange and yellow glow that reflects on the water's surface. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

**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.**