

2026 FEDERAL GREAT LAKES POLICY PRIORITIES

Top 5 Great Lakes Federal Policy Priorities for 2026

The Alliance for the Great Lakes has identified the top five opportunities for Congress and the Trump Administration to address challenges facing the Great Lakes. Federal water programs must be fully funded and prioritize communities where the burden of pollution hits hardest. This requires federal agencies to support scientific research and retain staff necessary to maintain long-term program integrity to protect the Great Lakes and the communities that depend on them.



Water Infrastructure

Increase water infrastructure funding, prioritize funding for communities most in need, and enact national water affordability legislation

Based on EPA survey data, the Great Lakes region needs at least \$290.3 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 2026, we urge Congress to:

- Reauthorize and 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.
- Set aside at least 20 percent of the Clean Water State Revolving Fund as grants for green infrastructure projects such as green roofs, permeable pavement, and additional green spaces in cities.
- Pass a federal ban on water shutoffs.
- Establish a federal program to provide financial assistance for water and sewer bills.

In 2026 we urge the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to:

- Provide technical assistance to communities bearing the greatest financial and pollution burdens to ensure full access to water infrastructure funding.



Great Lakes Restoration

Reauthorize and fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) is one of the most important tools in the region's toolbox to protect and restore the lakes. The program will require reauthorization by the end of 2026.

In 2026, we urge Congress to:

- Reauthorize the GLRI program for the next five years (FY 2027-2031).
- Fund the GLRI with at least \$500 million in FY2027.



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 by polluting drinking water, threatening wildlife, and harming the regional economy. In 2026, Congress can pass a Farm Bill that ensures farms produce clean water, not pollution, along with their crops.

In 2026, we urge Congress to pass a Farm Bill that:

- Increases funding for U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs.
- Ensures equitable distribution of conservation funding by reinstating payment limits.
- Includes provisions to ensure accountability for farm conservation programs aimed at stopping runoff pollution from agricultural lands.
- Targets federal funding for efforts to increase water quality monitoring in priority watersheds.



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 2026, we urge Congress to:

- Reduce plastic pollution at the source by passing the Plastic Pellet Free Waters Act, REUSE Act, and Farewell to Foam Act.
- Ensure that the U.S. EPA maintains strong protections from toxic pollution to protect human health and drinking water.
- Hold plastic waste producers accountable for its reduction, including by holding a hearing on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) progress in the United States.

In 2026, we urge the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to:

- Protect our drinking water by listing plastic as a chemical of mutual concern under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and establishing ongoing monitoring of the Great Lakes and drinking water for plastic contaminants.



Invasive Species

Protect the Great Lakes from aquatic invasive species

Invasive species have caused irreparable harm to the Great Lakes ecosystem and cost the region billions of dollars. Preventing them from ever entering is the best way to protect the Great Lakes. The battle against invasive species is primarily focused on stopping invasive carp from entering the Great Lakes.

In 2026, we urge Congress to:

- Fund the second phase of construction of the Brandon Road Interbasin Project.
- Authorize full (100%) federal funding for the remaining operation, maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, and replacement (OMRR&R) costs for the project.
- Ensure the continuity of coordinated interagency efforts to monitor, research, and address invasive species.

In 2026, we urge the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to:

- Continue implementing the first phase of construction for the Brandon Road project while proceeding in parallel with Preconstruction Engineering and Design (PED) for increments two and three, in partnership with Illinois and Michigan.