

**Testimony by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to the
United States House of Representatives Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
titled “Protecting and Restoring America’s Iconic Waters.”
Specifically, regarding the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)
Submitted by Secretary Preston D. Cole on behalf of Governor Tony Evers Chair of the
Conference of Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governor & Premiers.
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Members of the subcommittee. I’m honored to provide this testimony and speak with you today regarding this incredible resource that accounts for 90% of the United States’ fresh surface water— the Great Lakes.

I am also happy to be here today on behalf of my boss, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers. Governor Evers has made clean water a priority, declaring 2019 as the Year of Clean Drinking Water in Wisconsin. In addition, as chair of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers, Governor Evers is continuing to lead a regional effort that has as its hallmark, broad bipartisan support for these lakes as both an environmental and economic juggernaut for North America. In fact, nearly two decades ago, the Great Lakes Governors identified nine regional priorities that became the basis for the 2005 Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy. That “blueprint for action” at the time estimated that at a minimum we would need \$20 billion to address all the priorities and since then the region has moved forward with one voice, in support of significant federal investment in this strategy to protect and restore our Great Lakes.

Our Great Lakes are the largest system of fresh waters on Earth. It is a treasured system, but we need to continue to invest in our Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) has jump started the federal commitment to implementing the 2005 collaboration strategy. The GLRI is clearly working, but much more needs to be done. Your ongoing bipartisan support of the Great Lakes is commendable and a testament to the importance of the Great Lakes to our region and nation. Over 30 million Americans rely on the Great Lakes for drinking water; and the Great Lakes region, if it was a nation, would have the world’s third largest regional economy at \$6 trillion annually, and directly generates more than 1.5 million jobs.

The GLRI investment of more than \$3 billion to date is significant and represents a healthy down payment to protect and restore the most significant fresh, surface water resource on the planet— our Great Lakes. Protecting and restoring them is a non-partisan priority for the people of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. To date, the GLRI has funded more than 4,500 projects throughout the region, cleaning up toxic hot spots, restoring critical habitat, preventing the spread of invasive species and reduce polluted runoff into the region’s waterways. These investments are not only producing great environmental results, but great economic results as well.

This is why, speaking on behalf of Governor Evers and for the state of Wisconsin, I am urging Congress to reauthorize the GLRI for five years at \$475 million per year— the amount first

appropriated in 2010. This increase, from the current authorization of \$300 million a year will build on the important foundation built over the last decade, which has proven to be not only a tremendous ecological investment, but a wonderful economic investment as well.

Economy and Environment

We have made some important strides in cleaning up our Great Lakes and this work we do together has resulted in environmental benefits and economic revitalization critical to quality of life of the region and nation. Our communities have seen direct benefits with economic recovery and people are reconnecting to the water. The GLRI provides critical funding for protection and restoration efforts. Since 2010 the multi-agency GLRI has provided funding to 15 federal organizations to strategically target the biggest threats to the Great Lakes ecosystem and to accelerate progress toward achieving the following long-term goals:

- Fish safe to eat
- Water safe for recreation
- Safe source of drinking water
- All severely polluted sites, known as “Areas of Concern¹” cleaned up
- Harmful algal blooms eliminated
- No new self-sustaining invasive species
- Existing invasive species controlled
- Native habitat protected and restored to sustain native species.

For the first year of GLRI, Congress allocated \$475 million in federal fiscal year 2010. Congress has since allocated approximately \$300 million for each of the following nine federal fiscal years².

State and local governments and nonprofit organizations are eligible to receive grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for projects addressing:

1. toxic substances;
2. invasive species;
3. nonpoint source pollution;
4. habitat protection and restoration; and
5. monitoring.

Non-governmental groups, industries, businesses, cities, states, and tribal governments are forging partnerships and working with federal agencies to clean up toxic hot spots, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and combat invasive species.

¹ Areas of Concern were designated by the International Joint Commission as geographically-defined sites in the Great Lakes Basin having severe environmental pollution. They were designated in 1987 as part of an international agreement between the U.S. and Canada known as the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. There are 43 Areas of Concern listed: 26 in the United States, 17 in Canada. So far, four AOCs in the U.S. and three in Canada have been cleaned up and removed from this list (“delisted”). <https://www.epa.gov/great-lakes-aocs>

² 2017. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Report to Congress and the President. Pp 26-27. <https://www.glri.us/sites/default/files/fy2017-glri-report-to-congress-201902-36pp.pdf>. See also: <https://www.glri.us/projects#map>

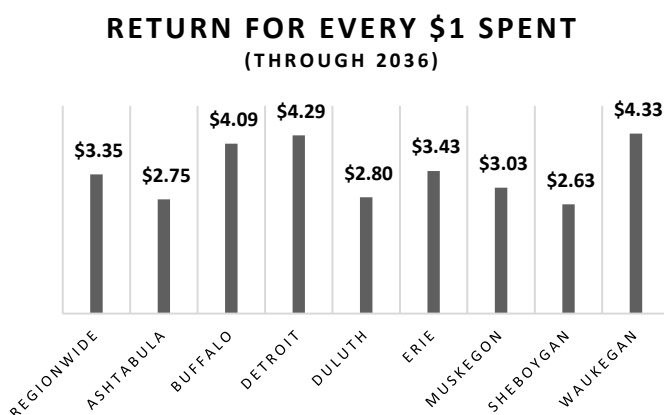
Environmental and Economic Benefits

Cleaning up the Great Lakes is critical for the health and quality of life of the region and nation. Here are a few examples:

- GLRI funding is accelerating cleanup of Great Lakes toxic hotspots. Work in one of these hotspots in Muskegon, Michigan, is projected to increase property values by nearly \$12 million, contribute \$600,000 in new tax revenues annually, and attract 65,000 new visitors, generating more than \$1 million in new recreational spending.
- GLRI funding is cleaning up a legacy of toxic sediments in waterfront areas. Cleanups are ready to begin at 10 sites in five states, with 50 contaminated sediment cleanups projected over the next five years. Nearly \$90 million is needed for toxic sediment cleanups in FY 2020, which are projected to leverage more nearly \$60 million from non-federal partners.
- GLRI funding is helping protect drinking water for 48 million people by working with farmers to prevent nearly 800,000 pounds of phosphorous from polluting the Great Lakes and causing harmful algae blooms. In 2014, a toxic bloom cut off access to clean drinking water for more than 500,000 people. Blooms also threaten Lake Erie's critical \$15 billion tourism industry.³

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is also creating jobs and revitalizing struggling communities across the eight-state Great Lakes region. The Great Lakes provide the backbone for a \$6 trillion regional economy—the world's third largest regional economy. The Great Lakes directly generate more than 1.5 million jobs and \$60 billion in wages annually.

A recent economics study, sponsored by the Great Lakes Commission and the Council of Great Lakes Industries, released in September 2018, found that every \$1.00 spent on the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative from 2010 through 2016 will produce at least \$3.35 of additional economic activity in the Great Lakes region through 2036. The number was even higher in some Great Lakes communities (see chart at right). For instance, each dollar invested in Buffalo, NY and Detroit,



³ Great Lakes Commission. Mar. 2019. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative: Creating Jobs and Revitalizing Communities. <https://www.glc.org/wp-content/uploads/GLC-GLRI-FactSheet-March2019-FINAL.pdf>

MI will produce more than \$4.00 of additional economic activity through 2036.⁴

Other findings of this study conducted by economists at the University of Michigan, Central Michigan University, and Duke University include:

- GLRI has enhanced tourism in the Great Lakes region. Every dollar of GLRI project spending from 2010 through 2016 will generate \$1.62 in economic value in tourism-related industries through 2036.
- GLRI increased the value that residents place on living in coastal areas. Every project dollar spent between 2010 and 2016 produced quality of life improvements in coastal communities worth \$1.08 to residents as measured in housing values, which means that people place a higher value on living in those communities because of GLRI projects.
- The research also shows that, despite being envisioned as an environmental program, the GLRI created or supported as many jobs per dollar of investment as would be created by a conventional federal stimulus program designed to boost job growth. The GLRI created or supported an average of 5,180 jobs per year and increased personal income by an average of \$250 million per year in the Great Lakes region from 2010–2016.⁵

These economic outcomes are possible because of restoration successes like these:

- Four of the United States' Areas of Concern have been delisted, and an additional eight have completed all management actions necessary to delist.
- Between 2010 through 2017, 73 Beneficial Use Impairments have been removed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—more than six times the total number of impairments removed in the preceding 22 years. Beneficial Use Impairments are the benchmarks of environmental harm and characterize AOCs.
- Early detection and monitoring and vital support for the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee has prepared the region to respond to new and existing aquatic invasive species. Also, federal agencies and partners funded work to protect over 18,000 acres from terrestrial invasive species. Since the GLRI's inception more than 134,000 acres have been protected or treated.
- Combined with other funding, farmers implemented conservation actions on more than 750,000 acres of rural lands through 2017 to reduce erosion and farm runoff that feeds

⁴ 2018. University of Michigan Research Seminar in Quantitative Economics. Socioeconomic Impacts of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. <https://lsa.umich.edu/econ/rsqe/impact-analysis/great-lakes-restoration.html>.

See also: 2018. Great Lakes Commission. Assessing the Investment: The Economic Impact of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. <https://www.glc.org/work/blue-economy/GLRI-economic-impact>.

⁵ Ibid.

toxic algal outbreaks. GLRI's supplemental funding helped double farmland under conservation around Western Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay, and Green Bay, reducing projected phosphorus runoff by nearly 770,000 pounds.

- Habitat connectivity for fish and wildlife is improving as the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration worked with many partners to restore, protect, or enhance over 200,000 acres of wetlands and other habitat. 4,967 river miles have also been cleared of dams and barriers resulting in fish swimming into stretches of river where they have been absent for decades.

Thanks to the GLRI, environmental cleanup in communities across the Great Lakes Basin is paving the way for regional economic recovery and re-investment.

We Must Maintain Support Until the Job is Done

Even with the tremendous results we are seeing, the Great Lakes still face serious threats. Twenty-two U.S. Areas of Concern are still contaminated with toxic sediment, threatening the health of people and stunting the development of communities. Harmful runoff from farm fields continues to pollute our waters, causing toxic algae outbreaks that threaten water systems, public health, and economic vitality. Habitat loss and aquatic invasive species continue to damage our region's outdoor way of life. And communities across the Great Lakes region continue to grapple with crumbling, antiquated drinking water and wastewater infrastructure and are faced with a staggering \$179 billion over the next 20 years for needed improvements, upgrades, and repairs in the eight-state region. Most of these threats disproportionately impact people that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice, underscoring an urgency to address these issues for everyone in the region.

Furthermore, our changing climate is exacerbating all our region's challenges. We are seeing effects such as changes in surface water temperatures, changes in the frequency and intensity of storm events, and more dramatic swings between record-breaking high and low water levels in the Great Lakes.

Ongoing, human-induced climate changes will only bring additional changes to the lakes, making existing stresses worse. Increased storm intensity and frequency leads to increased loads of nutrients and other contaminants such as sediment, pathogens, and chemicals of emerging concern. This pollution comes from both nonpoint sources like agricultural fields and city streets, and from point sources like combined stormwater and sewage overflows in urban areas. These changes will challenge infrastructure in both rural and urban areas. The general warming of waters due to climate change will also bring both new aquatic invasive species threats (such as Asian carp) in addition to existing aquatic invasive species that will have new potential to expand their range northward. Invasive species already present in the lower lakes (such as water chestnut, European frog-bit, and flowering rush) all are poised to spread northward.

Other climate impacts include alterations to lake temperature stratification; which changes oxygen levels, internal nutrient cycling, the entire ecosystem's food webs—and ultimately the entire assemblage of species that can live in these waters. Finally, climate change has implications for flooding, water level fluctuations, and sustainable water supplies with ongoing questions about overall impacts decades into the future. How these changes impact the people living in the basin is of great concern.

The Great Lakes are also facing a new host of chemicals that were not understood just a decade ago. Nanoparticles, plastics, pharmaceuticals, personal care products, brominated flame retardants, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are being detected with increasing frequency. There are ongoing questions that remain unanswered about these new pollutants such as their sources, cycling, bioaccumulation through the food chain, exposures and effects, including potential implications of multiple chemical exposures.

We do have solutions to these problems, but we need funding to enact them. Congress must continue to fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and other fundamental restoration programs that produce results. Congressional investments will help communities replace lead pipes, address emerging contaminants like PFAS, clean up toxic sediments, end polluted stormwater runoff, fix aged sewer lines, and keep water affordable and safe for everyone. Congress must support action to stop Asian carp and other aquatic invasive species from invading the Great Lakes. Congress must support mitigating the damage from climate change to help the Great Lakes adapt to a changing climate. We also need strong clean water protections, as well as institutions that are adequately staffed and funded to enforce the protections that we all depend on.

And the region is ready for these investments. With additional GLRI funds, 10 contaminated sediment cleanup projects— in the Detroit River (MI), St. Louis River (WI and MN), Niagara River (NY), Cuyahoga River (OH), and Milwaukee River (WI)— are ready to break ground in 2020. These projects are expected to require \$88 million in federal funding under the Great Lakes Legacy Act (funded through the GLRI), with another \$59 million to be provided by non-federal partners. Many other site investigations are underway to prepare for cleanup projects in coming years. Without GLRI funds, some of Minnesota's \$25 million in bonding money, for example, could be left on the table.

Conclusion

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is working, but much more needs to be done. When the initial regional collaboration document was developed in 2005, it was estimated that we needed \$20 billion dollars to address all the needs. So while \$3.1 billion appropriated to date may seem like a lot of money, it is still just a healthy down payment to protect and restore the most significant fresh, surface water resource on the planet— our Great Lakes. These investments are not only producing great environmental results, but great economic results as well. This is why we need to reauthorize the GLRI for five years at \$475 million per year— the amount first promised in 2010, but only appropriated once in the first year.