



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

GARLIN GILCHRIST II  
LT. GOVERNOR

June 24, 2019

The Honorable Grace F. Napolitano  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bruce Westerman  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Napolitano, Ranking Member Westerman, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the State of Michigan, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), I ask you to reauthorize the Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

The subject of Tuesday's hearing is to protect and restore America's iconic waters. As Governor of The Great Lakes State, I believe there are no more iconic waters in our country than The Great Lakes. These bodies of water hold 21 percent of the world's freshwater, 84 percent of the country's fresh surface water, and generate over one million jobs. In addition to offering unique, pristine beauty, The Great Lakes are among the most vital ecological and economic resources in America.

Congress has long recognized the importance of The Great Lakes and has taken action to protect and restore this precious resource. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), created by Congress in 2010, is a key means by which the Federal Government demonstrates its commitment to The Great Lakes. The GLRI is a multi-agency collaboration that provides funding to 16 federal organizations to strategically target the biggest threats to The Great Lakes ecosystem and to accelerate progress toward achieving long term goals, including ensuring safe sources of drinking water; providing safe water for recreation, including the catching and



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

GARLIN GILCHRIST II  
LT. GOVERNOR

consumption of fish; delisting of federal Areas of Concern (AOCs); and protecting habitats and native populations from harmful algal blooms and invasive species. Since 2010, the GLRI has provided nearly \$3 billion to federal organizations to work toward these goals. Over the past nine years, one-third of the region's most toxic hotspots have been cleaned up, sparking redevelopment and business opportunities on waterfronts; conservation practices on area farms have doubled, reducing harmful nutrient runoff; and habitat and wildlife connectivity continue to improve, with nearly 5,000 miles of rivers cleared of dams and other barriers.

In Michigan, there are many demonstrable positive impacts of the GLRI to our economy, our people, and our environment. A wide variety of programs in Michigan's EGLE and DNR are supported by the GLRI, including infrastructure related to The Great Lakes and the Aquatic Invasive Species program. Local communities have received millions of dollars of GLRI funding, enabling the creation of programs to address AOCs that have been identified as showing severe environmental degradation, combat invasive species that threaten tourism and the economy, and improve conditions across parks, lakes, and riverfronts.

Among many examples of the impact of GLRI funds on Michigan communities and the health of The Great Lakes:

- Two of Michigan's fourteen Areas of Concern, White Lake in West Michigan and Deer Lake in the Upper Peninsula, have been cleaned up and removed from the list of Great Lakes toxic hotspots;
- The GLRI funds a Michigan Grass Carp response team that is responsible for leading the implementation of control actions in Michigan waters of Lake Erie. Grass Carp, one of four invasive Asian carp species, have the potential to disrupt The Great Lakes' ecosystems by consuming large amounts of vegetation and reducing habitat for native fish and wildlife. Crews are conducting work to address critical uncertainties that are limiting the effectiveness of removal actions. These actions will lead to more effective control strategies, with the goal of eradicating Grass Carp from The Great Lakes;
- GLRI-funded restoration work in Lake Michigan and Lake Huron is restoring historically important reef complexes to support the recovery of native fish species, such as Lake Trout and Whitefish, which are vitally important to our recreational and commercial fisheries. For example, with \$980,000 in GLRI funding, The Saginaw Bay Rock Reef Restoration Project will restore approximately 2 acres of rock reef habitat to support the bay's recreational fishery; and
- In 2015 and 2016, \$9 million in GLRI funding was used to construct the Little Rapids GLRI habitat restoration project on the St. Marys River. The project removed a causeway and replaced it with approximately 600 feet of open-span bridge, restoring unrestricted flow of the St. Marys River through the Little Rapids to improve fish spawning habitat for several important game species, such as salmon, trout, bass, perch, and smelt.



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

GARLIN GILCHRIST II  
LT. GOVERNOR

But there is much more to be done. The spread of new and existing aquatic invasive species continues to be exacerbated by warming waters due to climate change. Our residents' health is still at risk due to toxic sediment in the remaining twenty-two AOCs. Harmful algal blooms caused by runoff from farm fields threaten our water systems and economy. Communities across The Great Lakes region face aging, crumbling drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, while lead, copper, and emerging contaminants such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) pose risks to the safety of our drinking water.

The Great Lakes have benefited immeasurably from the GLRI, and we must neither slow nor halt the progress that has been made in protecting and restoring these iconic waters. Knowing of its importance, I respectfully ask Congress to reauthorize the GLRI for five years at \$475 million per year, the amount first appropriated in 2010. The Great Lakes region's economy, environment, and public health all rely on this important program.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Whitmer  
Governor of Michigan