



2024 Position Paper

FUND THE GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE

Summary:

The Great Lakes include 20 percent of the world's surface freshwater and host diverse communities of aquatic and terrestrial life. Launched in 2010, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) was created to accelerate efforts to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the Great Lakes Basin ecosystem. The GLRI seeks to replace earlier piecemeal approaches to ecosystem restoration with a single comprehensive program. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) leads and administers the restoration initiative and partners with multiple federal agencies to carry out restoration projects.

AGLPA Position:

Between 2010 - 2022 Congress appropriated \$4.17 billion to support the program's initiatives throughout the Great Lakes region. The 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provided an additional \$1 billion. As stakeholders in a healthy, productive ecosystem, Great Lakes ports support the GLRI program and urge Congress to approve no less than \$450 million in the EPA's FY2025 budget - the full, authorized amount.

Congress should also enact H.R. 7257 and S. 3738, legislation to reauthorize the program from FY2027-FY2031 at \$500 million/year.

Additional Background:

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative replaces scores of earlier programs with a single, coordinated effort to proactively rehabilitate the Great Lakes. Both past and current practices have left these inland seas with a legacy of contamination, habitat loss and a compromised ecosystem. Although launched by President Obama in 2009, GLRI is a bi-partisan initiative built on a foundation of earlier work. A 2004 executive order by President Bush established a Great Lakes Interagency Task Force to coordinate federal agency actions related to Great Lakes restoration. In 2005, Great Lakes stakeholders (including AGLPA) worked to develop the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy, which outlines eight priority areas for restoration action.

President Obama proposed the creation of GLRI in his first budget and included \$475 million for its first year (FY2010). Lead by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Interagency Task Force worked with stakeholders to develop a 5-year action plan to guide GLRI work between 2010-14. The Great Lakes Restoration Action Plan identifies five areas of focus: 1) toxic substances and areas of concern; 2) invasive species; 3) nearshore health & non-point source pollution; 4) habitat and wildlife protection/restoration; and 5) education, monitoring, and measuring/evaluating progress. In September 2014, a second five-year plan was announced by EPA for action between 2015-19. In October 2019 the EPA published Action Plan III, which outline initiatives for 2020-24.

Since GLRI was launched, more than 5300 individual projects have been implemented across the Great Lakes region in these five focus areas. Projects have been carried out by federal agencies in partnership with states, counties, municipalities, universities, and other stakeholders - including ports.

On February 6, 2024, bipartisan legislation was introduced in the House (H.R. 7257) and Senate (S. 3738) to reauthorize the GLRI program between FY2027-FY2031 at a level of \$500 million per year. The current program authorization expires at the end of FY2026.