



U.S. House of Representatives
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee
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Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
Testimony of the Coalition
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking member Napolitano, members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to speak to the importance of the Great Lakes and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to our country and to North America.

I represent the Great Lakes Metro Chambers Coalition, a nearly 40-member voluntary group of chambers of commerce dedicated to the continuing revitalization of the Great Lakes trading region through federal policy in five arenas that are key to the region's future.

Together with the Great Lakes Manufacturing Council, the Coalition has pioneered the concept that this great bi-national region of twelve states and two provinces is the third largest economy in the world, behind only the United States and China. Our region is built upon advanced manufacturing and depends on some of the most highly regarded supply chains in the world. Those supply chains, in turn, depend on robust transportation infrastructure, including inland waterways like the Great Lakes.

That is one lens through which we view the lakes. There is another lens: the Great Lakes as our region's defining geographic asset and the most important body of fresh water in the world – with 22% of the world's surface fresh water and 84% of North America's surface freshwater.

In the view of the Coalition, the lakes are the center of the region's present and the key to its future. They provide the fresh water so important to the place-making opportunities that shape our economy in addition to a fuel-efficient, environmentally-friendly highway for the movement of the bulk commodities and heavy finished goods that are so essential to Midwest manufacturing and agriculture.

The preservation and enhancement of the quality of the Great Lakes is one of the Coalition's primary strategic issues for the region. The other elements include:

- Surface and water transportation infrastructure and funding
- Border crossings between the U.S. and Canada
- Base load energy development
- Immigration of highly-skilled talent

This session, the Coalition has three primary focal points related to the water quality in our region:

- The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (“the GLRI”, or “the Initiative”)
- The Clean Water State Revolving Fund
- The prevention of Asian Carp in the Great Lakes, as well as their eradication from the Ohio and Mississippi watersheds

In prior generations, the place-making and commercial uses of the lakes were viewed by many as being mutually exclusive and conflicting. Today, it is widely acknowledged that we can have both clean, desirable waterways and economic growth. We have the technologies and the know-how, if we have the will.

The Coalition views the GLRI as one of the great environmental stories of our time. Fifteen federal agencies, as well as White House staff, coordinate projects and activities to restore the lakes. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan identifies five major focus areas:

- Toxic Substances and Areas of Concern — preventing pollution and cleaning-up the most polluted areas in the Great Lakes

- Invasive Species — instituting a "zero tolerance policy" toward new invasions and preventing the establishment of self-sustaining populations of invasive species such as Asian carp
- Nearshore Health and Nonpoint Source Pollution — targeting high-priority watersheds and polluted runoff reductions from urban, suburban and agricultural sources
- Habitat and Wildlife Protection and Restoration — bringing wetlands and other habitat back to life, including the first comprehensive assessment of the entire 530,000 acres of Great Lakes coastal wetlands to target restoration and protection efforts using the best science
- Accountability, Education, Monitoring, Evaluation, Communication and Partnerships — building goal- and results-based accountability measures, learning initiatives, outreach and partnerships

Since its inception in FY2010, the Initiative has provided \$1.96 billion toward restoration efforts, and a recent Government Accounting Office report showed that, of the \$1.68 billion allocated by Congress through FY2014, \$1.66 billion (99%) had been obligated and \$1.15 billion (69%) had been spent on 2,123 projects. In all, through August of 2014, the Initiative has supported over 2,500 restoration projects.

For a relatively new endeavor, the results have been impressive. They include:

- Areas of Concern (AOCs) – delisting of five AOCs, including Presque Ile Bay, compared to only one in the prior 25 years
- Invasive Species – an aggressive ramp-up to prevent new introductions, including support for the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee
- Nearshore Health and Nonpoint Source Pollution – reduction of phosphorus run-off from agricultural lands and an increase of enrolled farmland in priority watersheds by more than 70%
- Habitat Wildlife Protection and Restoration – the protection, restoration and enhancement of more than 100,000 acres of wetlands and 48,000 acres of habitat, with the removal of over 500 barriers in tributaries
- Accountability, Education, Monitoring, Evaluation, Communication and Partnerships – outreach to more than 175,000 students

There are 5,300 miles of U.S. shoreline, this is complex work, and we are learning as we go. As we look forward to the second major phase of the Action Plan for the Initiative from FY 2015 to FY2019, we welcome the continued focus on these key areas, as well as the introduction of science-based adaptive management, improvements in prioritization, and better reporting on measures of progress and their impact.

Observers and analysts have sometimes tried to convert the Initiative into a Return on Investment model. Because of the complexity of the process and the long timelines for projects, it's a very difficult task and an inexact process. In September of 2007, however, a group of scientists, economists and other experts convened by the Brookings Institution projected the net benefits of pursuing proposed solutions in the *Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes*, otherwise known as the Great Lakes Restoration Strategy, which was a research project led by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The results indicated that a present-value total investment of \$26 billion in ecological restoration would yield over \$50 billion in long-term benefits to the national economy and between \$30 billion and \$50 billion short-term benefits to the regional economy. Those were a combination of direct and indirect benefits.

It's hard to pin precise ROI numbers on the GLRI. We are aware of a Grand Valley State University estimate of a \$66 million return on a \$10 million federal investment on the south shore of Muskegon Lake, not including property value increases. We are confident that as individual Areas of Concern are resolved through remediation and restoration, the quality of our places will improve, and over time, that

will result in more attractive communities for living, working, and playing. After only five years of aggressive pursuit of AOCs, we are just beginning to see the results.

Beyond all the numbers, though, there is a visceral understanding throughout the region that the GLRI is the right thing to do - for our communities, our states, our nation and our generations to come.

The Coalition stands firmly in support of the continued pursuit of the GLRI and has advocated that Congress maintain the appropriations level at \$300 million. We have strenuously objected when proposals to significantly reduce that level were considered, we have witnessed the restoration of funds by Congress to the higher, more effective levels, and we thank Congress for its vision in continuing to move the initiative forward.

We support HR 223, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2015, which would extend the authorization for the GLRI through Fiscal Year 2020 and make numerous improvements to the program authority. It had 41 cosponsors as of last week.

We also commend the federal government for its growing multidisciplinary, multi-agency approach to the initiative. That is indeed a strong-point that can serve as a benchmark for other federal programs, in addition to creating better solutions for the lakes. It was highlighted in the GAO's report.

In a word, our position is: Let's keep up the good work, and do it better.

How can we do better? We'll defer to the experts, but here are some general suggestions:

- Formal authorization of the GLRI; HR 223 can be that vehicle
- Improved consultation, collaboration and coordination - leading to better implementations
 - With other federal agencies and programs
 - With states and communities
 - With stakeholder groups
 - With public engagement
- Continued improvements in monitoring, measurement and reporting, from both the environmental viewpoint and the economic viewpoint
- Data, data, data, easily accessible and available to all

We believe that these improvements will accelerate both the performance and the outcomes of the Initiative.

Closing with the AOCs, it appears that we are about halfway home in total investment, and progress is accelerating. We have invested about \$8 billion of a projected total of about \$16 billion. We need to finish the job, take stock of where we stand, then identify how to maintain and leverage the great gains we have made with these precious assets. There is a consensus among nearly all groups in our region that the restoration and maintenance of these great waterways is fundamental to our region's economic and social future.

Thank you for the opportunity to present today.