



Great News for the Great Lakes from Congress

\$475 million Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Clean Water Restoration Act, and Great Lakes Legacy Act move forward

ANN ARBOR, MICH. (June 19)—Key steps were taken this week in Congress towards comprehensive restoration of The Great Lakes, adding momentum to the movement to protect the region’s most important environmental and economic asset.

President Obama’s \$475 million Great Lakes Restoration Initiative was passed with full funding by the House Appropriations Committee, chaired by Rep. Dave Obey (D-WI). The initiative, originally proposed in President Obama’s FY2010 Budget, will fund programs to address invasive species, toxic pollution and habitat restoration. The plan will now likely be voted on by the full House next week before being addressed in the Senate.

The Clean Water Restoration Act (S. 787) was approved by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and will now be considered by the full Senate. The measure restores Clean Water Act protections to wetlands, lakes, and streams that were compromised in recent Supreme Court decisions – its passage is a key component of the plan to restore and protect the Great Lakes. The Act will soon be introduced in the House and considered by the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee. Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) led the effort to pass this bill and was joined by Sens., Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), and Arlen Specter (D-PA) who all voted for this important bill.

The Great Lakes Legacy Act (S. 933) had its funding increased by \$150 million per year through fiscal year 2014 by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. Great Lakes Legacy Act funds are distributed through the USEPA Great Lakes National Program Office to clean toxic sediment contamination in the Great Lakes. The House passed a similar increase in March – the measure now moves to the full Senate as either a stand-alone bill or as part of a larger water investment bill. EPW-Committee member Sen. George Voinovich (R-OH) sponsored the legislation (with Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI), which passed in the committee by voice vote.

“This is another big week for the Great Lakes,” said **Andy Buchsbaum, co-chair of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition**, “But it’s important to remember that Congress still has work to do before these measures are made into law and fulfill President Obama’s promise for Great Lakes restoration. We applaud the recent actions taken and urge our representatives in the Senate and the House to finish the job.”

The Great Lakes restoration effort is also boosted by other news from Washington.

The Clean Coastal Environment and Public Health Act (S. 878), which will improve the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (“BEACH”) Act, was approved by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and will now be considered by the full Senate. **The Sewage Overflow Community Right-to-Know Act (S. 937)**, which requires reporting on hazardous sewer overflow releases in communities, was also approved by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and will now be considered by the full Senate. In addition to the efforts in Congress, the White House recently released a memo creating a task force to examine national policy for oceans, coasts, and The Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes are increasingly seen as an economic asset. According to a Brookings Institution study, investing \$26 billion to restore the Great Lakes will lead to at least \$50 billion in economic benefit for the region. Metropolitan areas like Duluth, Detroit, Chicago, and Buffalo could see gains between \$200 million to \$7 billion.

Source of more than 90 percent of the nation’s surface fresh water, the Great Lakes are seriously threatened by problems such as sewage contamination, invasive species, toxic pollution and the loss of wetlands and other habitat. When the Lakes are unhealthy, it is a drain on the economy and it means fewer jobs for the region. Just as disturbing, unhealthy Lakes mean fewer people can enjoy beaches, fishing, waterways and clean drinking water.

The Healthy Lakes, Healthy Lives Campaign is directed by the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition. The coalition is co-chaired by the National Wildlife Federation and consists of more than 100 environmental, conservation, outdoor recreation organizations, zoos, aquariums and museums representing millions of people, whose common goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

For more information, visit: <http://www.healthylakes.org/>

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Contact:

Andy Buchsbaum, Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, 734-887-7100

Chad Lord, Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, 202-257-4365

Jordan Lubetkin, Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, (734) 904-1589