



## New Report: Great Lakes Wetlands at Risk Due to Gaps in State, Federal Policy

**ANN ARBOR, MICH. (July 7)**—As efforts to restore the Great Lakes gain momentum in the White House and U.S. Congress, a new report by the National Wildlife Federation illustrates how gaps in state and federal policy threaten Great Lakes wetlands.

“Great Lakes wetlands remain threatened,” said **Marc Smith, state policy manager for the National Wildlife Federation’s Great Lakes Regional Center**. “States play a vital role in protecting our wetlands, water quality and economy—and this report illustrates that they can be doing more. Successful restoration of our Great Lakes depends on the protection and restoration of the region’s wetlands.”

The report examines state wetland policies in Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Minnesota. It assesses how well each state is protecting wetlands, identifies the barriers to better protection, and offers recommendations for improvement.

“This report underscores that states are doing many things well in the effort to protect Great Lakes wetlands,” said **Michael Murray, staff scientist for the National Wildlife Federation’s Regional Center**. “However, states can do better to protect Great Lakes wetlands so that we protect our environment and economy, before the problems get worse and the solutions more costly.”

State efforts to protect and restore wetlands, according to the report, are hampered by incomplete wetland inventories, inadequate staffing, insufficient public engagement, and a lack of priorities to protect and restore wetlands.

Gaps in state law also undermine protection efforts. Exemptions which allow for the destruction of wetlands are generally not tracked by state agencies. Further, the quality of wetland mitigation projects is not often tracked, allowing for the destruction of high-quality wetlands that are replaced with wetlands of less value to people and wildlife.

“Protecting and Restoring the Kidneys of the Great Lakes: An Assessment of Wetland Programs in Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin” also recommends how Great Lakes wetlands can be better protected. Among the recommendations:

- Establish state priorities for restoring wetlands;
- Improve inventories of wetlands in states to gauge progress or challenges; and,
- Restore Clean Water Act protections to isolated wetlands and other U.S. waters left unprotected by recent Supreme Court decisions.

Wetlands provide essential services for people and wildlife. Wetlands filter pollution out of water, control flooding, prevent erosion and provide a home for waterfowl, fish and wildlife that is the

foundation of the region's recreational economy. One acre of wetlands provides \$10,573 of ecosystem services, according to recent estimates.

However, Great Lakes wetlands are threatened by development. The region has lost more than 50 percent of its historic wetlands. Some coastal areas have lost more than 95 percent of wetlands.

Our partners had this to say about the report released today:

**MICHIGAN:**

“Thirty years ago, members of Michigan’s legislature enacted the state’s Wetland Protection Act, which made Michigan a national leader in wetland protection and management,” said **Jennifer McKay, policy specialist for Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council**. “However, statutory exemptions, budget cuts, lack of political will, and lack of enforcement have hindered Michigan’s ability to fully protect the integrity of our wetland ecosystems. We have an opportunity in Michigan to build upon the legacy begun 30 years ago and provide adequate protections essential to the health of the Great Lakes. By protecting Michigan’s wetlands, we protect the essence of Michigan.”

**MINNESOTA:**

“We take pride in Minnesota’s wetland laws, which for more than 15 years have helped reduce wetland losses,” said **Henry VanOffelen, natural resources scientist with Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy**. “But, as outlined in the report, even stronger wetland protection laws with better accounting and enforcement are needed to meet the challenges wetlands will face over the next 30 years. Given expected population growth in the region, protecting wetlands will also be more important than ever to ensure good water quality and the integrity of many habitats that fish and wildlife communities depend on.”

**OHIO:**

“Ohio has lost over 90% of its wetlands,” said **David Celebrezze, director of air and water special projects for Ohio Environmental Council**. “Strong protections are needed to ensure we keep those free benefits they provide society such as slowing flood water, filtering pollutants, and providing green space for recreation, education, hunting, and fishing. However, the recent state budget proposal has us backsliding, as it would cut Ohio EPA staff that investigate public complaints and enforce our wetlands rules.”

**WISCONSIN:**

“While Wisconsin overall has a strong wetlands protection program, there clearly needs to be improvements in wetland protection compliance and enforcement, improvement in public involvement in decision-making, the completion and updating of Wisconsin’s wetland inventory and the increase of staff to implement the program,” said **George Meyer, executive director for the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation**.

*National Wildlife Federation is America’s conservation organization inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children’s future.*

**Read the report, executive summary: <http://www.nwf.org/greatlakes>**

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