

Press Release

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Don't leave Great Lakes restoration money on the table!

Coalition calls for aggressive action to secure federal funding to clean up Michigan's Great Lakes "toxic hotspots"

As the "Great Lakes state," Michigan must not "leave money on the table" while the federal government invests over \$2 billion in cleanup efforts under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. A statewide coalition working to clean up Michigan's 14 Areas of Concern, or "toxic hotspots," brought this message to Lansing today, urging the legislature and the Administration to take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity to clean up toxic pollution, restore fish and wildlife, safeguard drinking water, enhance recreational opportunities and advance economic development in Michigan's most heavily impacted waterfront areas.

"The President's commitment to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to clean up the Great Lakes. We need to move aggressively to make sure we don't leave any money on the table as this initiative moves forward," said Jeff Spoelstra, Chair of the Statewide Public Advisory Council for Michigan's Great Lakes Areas of Concern program, which provides advice and guidance on the restoration of 14 sites designated by U.S. EPA as "Areas of Concern." Spoelstra noted that federal funding under the Initiative is being allocated on a competitive basis with no guaranteed amount for Michigan, adding that "we need to compete effectively with other states to make sure Michigan gets its fair share."

First proposed by President Obama in his 2010 budget, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) was fully funded by Congress at \$475 million for the current year. The U.S. EPA recently announced a five-year Action Plan for the Initiative that targets \$2.2 billion to halt the introduction and spread of invasive species, such as Asian carp; clean up contaminated sediments; control polluted runoff and clean up beach pollution; and restore and protect valuable fish and wildlife resources.

In its legislative agenda the Statewide Public Advisory Council outlines critical actions that Michigan must take to leverage funding under the GLRI. The Council also highlights dozens of specific restoration projects that Michigan's 14 Areas of Concern are pursuing. The Council is advancing three critical priorities:



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- **Maximize Michigan's ability to secure federal funding for the Great Lakes:** Ensure state agencies have the capacity to apply for funding, help local partners apply, and process permits and provide technical assistance for restoration projects.
- **Establish sustainable funding for programs that protect Michigan's air, land and water:** Develop fair and adequate funding mechanisms for programs that serve Michigan's citizens and businesses and protect public health and the state's valuable natural resources.
- **Create a mechanism to provide cost share for federal funding:** Many federal programs require cost share from applicants. In the past, funding from the Clean Michigan Initiative environmental bond program enabled Michigan to leverage over \$20 million in federal funding for important cleanups. These funds are largely exhausted and Michigan needs a new mechanism to ensure the state is able to continue leveraging federal funding. The Council urges the legislature and the Administration to authorize a new environmental bond program or consider reallocating existing, but unused, bonding authority.

The Council's complete 2010 Status Report and Legislative Agenda is online at <http://glc.org/spac/>.

Mary Bohling, Council vice chair and representative from the Detroit River, emphasized the urgent need for action to ensure Michigan takes full advantage of the GLRI. "This Initiative won't last forever. As a state, we need to step up and seize this opportunity to invest in our state's most important natural resource," Bohling said. She noted the overwhelming demand for resources under the Initiative's first year, with nearly 1,300 proposals submitted so far seeking over \$1 billion. More than 350 proposals were submitted from Michigan requesting over \$200 million. State agencies applied for almost \$35 million.

"We've seen a very impressive response from Michigan, but we have to keep it up," Bohling said, adding that "the state and local communities need to collaborate to maintain our capacity to take full advantage of the GLRI. Anything less would be a serious mistake and a failure to invest in one of our state's most important economic assets."

The Council is also emphasizing the importance of the Great Lakes to Michigan's economy. The Brookings Institution has projected over \$50 billion in long-term economic benefits from implementing a comprehensive restoration plan for the Great Lakes. Cleaning up contaminated sediments in the Areas of Concern, alone, is estimated to raise coastal property values by \$12-\$19 billion. A regional coalition of Chambers of Commerce, including those for Detroit and Grand Rapids, has highlighted Great Lakes restoration as a critical component of a larger agenda to create jobs and revitalize our regional economy.

The GLRI is supporting implementation of the *Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes*, a 2005 plan that outlines solutions to critical problems facing the lakes. The *MI-Great Lakes Plan* identifies how to carry out the strategy in Michigan. For the state's 14 Areas of Concern, a detailed strategy is in place identifying specific clean-up actions as well as science-based criteria to measure progress and determine when the areas can be "delisted," or formally removed from the list of Great Lakes toxic hotspots.

"We have a strong plan in place and we know what we need to do to clean up polluted water bodies in our communities. Now that we have the resources in hand, let's get the job done," said Council Chair Spoelstra.

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The Statewide Public Advisory Council is a coalition of local advisory councils that works with state, federal and local agencies in cleaning up Michigan's 14 Great Lakes Areas of Concern. Background on the Council, including a list of Council members, as well as information on Michigan's Great Lakes Areas of Concern is available from the Statewide Public Advisory Council's website at <http://www.glc.org/spac/>.