

**Testimony by National Parks Conservation Association to the House Committee on Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Regarding the resolution to memorialize the President and Congress of the United States to increase funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to \$475 million per year, HR 157.**

**Submitted by: Lynn McClure, Senior Director, Midwest  
National Parks Conservation Association  
Co-Chair, Healing our Waters Great Lakes Coalition  
[lmccclure@npca.org](mailto:lmccclure@npca.org), 781 Manchester Dr, Saugatuck, MI  
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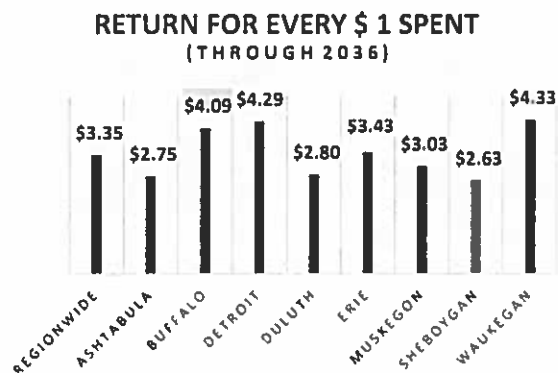
Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of the Great Lakes. I do so on behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition (HOW) and the National Parks Conservation Association. The HOW Coalition asks you to support HR 157 and send a message to the President and Congress of the United States that it is critical to increase funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to \$475 million a year.

Since 2004, the HOW Coalition has been harnessing the collective power of more than 160 groups representing millions of people, whose common goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes. Since 2007, I have been honored to act as one of the Coalition's two permanent co-chairs.

As the resolution maintains, the Great Lakes are tremendously important to our state and our nation. Over 30 million Americans rely on the Great Lakes for their drinking water, and our entire country benefits from the commerce that depends on these waters. Protecting and restoring them is a non-partisan priority for the people of Michigan and the entire eight-state Great Lakes region. Non-governmental groups, industries, businesses, cities, and states are forging partnerships to clean up toxic hot spots, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and combat invasive species because we know we have more work to do before Great Lakes restoration is complete.

We do this work because cleaning up the Great Lakes is critical for the health and quality of life of the region and nation. It drives economic development – and jobs – in communities all around the region, which supports the broader U.S. economy. A report in late 2018 from economists at the University of Michigan, Central Michigan University, and Duke University demonstrated that the GLRI's ecological investments are resulting in significant economic benefits.

The study showed that for every \$1 the GLRI invested through 2016 to clean up toxic hot spots in Areas of Concern (AOC), control invasive species, restore wildlife habitat, protect wetlands, and reduce harmful algae the investment will produce more than \$3 in additional economic activity regionwide through 2036 (Michigan cities highlighted in chart). This new research demonstrated that the GLRI is creating new real estate and



commercial development--particularly in waterfront areas. This development has resulted in a resurgence in water-based, outdoor recreation and tourism in Michigan and across the region, increasing housing options and home values, and an increasing number of young people staying in or relocating to Great Lakes communities. In addition, this research showed that restoration investments created or supported jobs.

The GLRI has:

- Tripled the delisting of areas with extreme degradation;
- Increased the remediation of environmental and public health impairments nearly seven-fold;
- Doubled farmland acres under conservation, reducing nutrient and sediment runoff;
- Invested in critical research and forecasting of toxic algal blooms;
- Controlled and stopped the advance of invasive species;
- Restored habitat connectivity to over 5,250 river miles.

Even with these results, there is still much work to be done. For example, invasive species, like Asian Carp, are knocking at the door of the Great Lakes and threaten its \$7 billion fishery. Moreover, emerging contaminants continue to exacerbate the challenges we face, many of which disproportionately impact people that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice. This underscores the urgency for the GLRI to address the growing threats with increased funding.

The GLRI has been an environmental and economic success, but much work remains. The region stands ready to continue this important federal partnership and ensure that all benefit from and enjoy these investments in restoration and protection in Michigan and throughout the Great Lakes region.