2023 U.S. Federal Priorities for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin

March 2023

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative calls on the U.S. federal government to support the following priorities in order to ensure the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin remains a vibrant place to live, work and play. Founded in 2003, the Cities Initiative is a binational coalition of more than 230 U.S. and Canadian mayors and local elected leaders dedicated to promoting the environmental and socioeconomic health of communities across the basin. For more information, please contact Travis Wheeler, Chief Policy Officer, at twheeler@glslcities.org.

Safeguard the Equitable Implementation of the Infrastructure Law

- Supplement Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) with robust appropriations in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 while expanding direct funding to municipalities and reducing red tape for water-infrastructure projects
- Advise states to maximize IIJA funding provided as grants or forgivable loans by revising state-level definitions of disadvantaged communities and waiving or reducing matching requirements in recognition of the fiscal constraints facing municipalities
- Ensure state agencies have the capacity needed to administer significantly higher funding levels and assist municipalities in securing new funding

Prioritize Lead Service Line Replacement and Safe Drinking Water

- Improve the distribution of DWSRF state capitalization grants for lead service line replacement (LSLR) by encouraging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to complete the 2022 Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment while incorporating available data on LSLR burden into the allocation formula
- Expand access to robust technical assistance for LSLR — including via the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund state capitalization grants for LSLR and the EPA-administered Environmental Finance Center mechanism — in order to support municipalities in the pre-application and pre-construction phases and enable significant progress on LSLR over the next decade
- Enforce the legal requirement that states use IIJA funding for complete LSLR, including any portion on the private side

Strengthen Lake-Borne Commerce and the Blue Economy

- Enhance the dependability of commerce on the Great Lakes by fully funding harbor maintenance activities from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund and providing no less than $40 million to the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) in FY24 for the construction of a new Great Lakes heavy icebreaker with an icebreaking capability equal to or greater than the USCGC Mackinaw
- Support the full establishment of the Great Lakes Authority (GLA) — and provide $33 million to the GLA in FY24 — to foster the creation of a Great Lakes-wide economic and infrastructure development plan that builds towards a vision of the blue economy that increases opportunities for current and future generations to live, work and play in the basin
- Facilitate the efficient cross-border movement of cargo and passengers — including cruise tourism and related economic activity — across the Great Lakes by providing appropriate funding to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection in FY24
Promote Ecosystem Restoration and Protect Water Quality

- Provide $425 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative in FY24 to support the continued restoration and revitalization of coastal communities and maximize the return on historic federal investments
- Provide full funding for Farm Bill agricultural conservation programs — including the Regional Conservation Partnership Program — that target the Great Lakes as a “critical conservation area” while mitigating harmful algal blooms and protecting water quality
- Ban harmful per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in consumer products; set enforceable limits on PFAS contamination in drinking water at levels consistent with evidence-based science; increase federal funding to rapidly deploy treatment technologies for PFAS-contaminated drinking water; designate PFAS as a hazardous substance under the Superfund program; require industry to contribute towards PFAS clean-up costs; restrict PFAS from being discharged into the environment; invest in research and monitoring; and strengthen EPA’s PFAS Strategic Roadmap and accelerate implementation

Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Bolster Coastal Resilience

- Provide full funding to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in FY24 to sustain progress on the Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study while encouraging close collaboration among the USACE, states, and municipalities in order to guarantee the study directly addresses the needs of coastal communities
- Minimize barriers — including cost-share requirements and overly restrictive technical criteria, such as International Building Code and International Residential Code standards — to improve municipalities’ ability to access the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program, the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund Program and other federally-supported efforts to protect coastal resources and mitigate damage from erosion, flooding and severe storms
- Aid municipalities seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and bolster coastal resilience by overseeing the equitable implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act, including the $5 billion for Climate Pollution Reduction Grants, $3 billion for Environmental and Climate Justice Block Grants and $2.6 billion for Coastal Communities and Climate Resilience Grants

Combat Aquatic Invasive Species

- Encourage the expeditious signing of the Project Partnership Agreement by the State of Illinois and the USACE for construction of the Brandon Road Lock and Dam while actively exploring all possible arrangements to avoid disruption in federally-supported efforts to prevent invasive carp from entering the Great Lakes
- Authorize a 100 percent federal cost share for construction, operation, maintenance, rehabilitation, replacement and non-structural measures for the Brandon Road Lock and Dam in the next iteration of the Water Resources Development Act
- Provide full funding for successful Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) programs, including the federal AIS task force, regional AIS panels and state AIS management plans established under the National Invasive Species Act and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission’s Sea Lamprey Control Program