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A Note to the Great Lakes Task Force

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Recap: Northeast-Midwest Institute Great Lakes Environmental Summit 2013

Overview of the Great Lakes Environmental Summit

Stakeholders from around the Great Lakes region convened in the Capitol Visitor's Center on Capitol Hill on February 6, 2013 for the annual Northeast-Midwest Institute's (NEMWI) Great Lakes Environmental Summit. The objective of the Summit, an event of NEMWI's Great Lakes Washington Program, was to identify and discuss opportunities to advance *Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy* objectives in the first session of the 113th Congress. Over 65 participants including Members of Congress, non-governmental organizations, federal agencies, states, industry and Congressional staff involved with Great Lakes federal policy issues attended and participated in the event.

The Summit comprised two main sessions: the first session in the morning gave attendees the opportunity to hear from House and Senate Committee staff on their expectations for the coming legislative session. The second session, in the afternoon, included updates from the Administration and the NEMWI on projects and programs, but largely afforded the participants the opportunity to discuss opportunities to coalesce around common issues.

Member Kick-off

Representatives Dan Benishek (MI-01), David Joyce (OH-14), and Brian Higgins (NY-26) kicked off the event, while Rep. Mike Kelly (PA-03) provided closing remarks for the morning session.

- **Rep. Benishek**, member of the Great Lakes Task Force and Northeast-Midwest Coalition, highlighted the importance of the Great Lakes to his district and Michigan as a whole, and noted the many issues potentially facing the Great Lakes, such as Asian carp and low water levels. The Congressman pointed out that these issues are complex, with multiple factors contributing to their causes, and they will need a united front and information from many of the individuals in the room to support lawmakers' decisions on solutions.

- **Rep. David Joyce**, a freshman and new member of the Great Lakes Task Force and Northeast-Midwest Coalition, noted his continued strong support for the Great Lakes, continuing on the tradition of the 14th District, which was former Northeast-Midwest Coalition co-chair Rep. Steve LaTourette's district. He encouraged all attendees to not hesitate in contacting his office to provide information on the different programs they represent within the Great Lakes community. He committed to strong support of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and supporting continued rebuilding and sustainable Great Lakes economic opportunities.
- **Rep. Brian Higgins**, member of the Great Lakes Task Force and Northeast-Midwest Coalition, highlighted the beneficial impacts to Great Lakes cities and economics from having restored and sustainable ecosystems. He noted the progress the city of Buffalo has made revitalizing both its economy and its environment, making it an attractive city for investment and living. He as well commended the group and encouraged continued communication with legislators on the importance of Great Lakes revitalization.
- **Rep. Mike Kelly**, Co-chair of the Northeast-Midwest Coalition and member of the Great Lakes Task Force, provided energy and encouragement to the attendees, highlighting the critical intersection of commerce, manufacturing, environmental health, and energy needs of the region. He noted the powerful force that is the Great Lakes delegation and called on its stakeholders and leaders to respond to common issues in a coordinated, bipartisan manner to achieve results, like harbor maintenance and invasive species. He also encouraged the attendees to continue to engage and provide critical information to all members of the delegation—to support and help strengthen the region.

** Senator Carl Levin (MI) intended to speak at the Summit but was unable to attend. The NEMWI is grateful to Sen. Levin for his willingness to participate and continued support.**

Committee Staff Participation

Several Senate and House Committee staff contributed much appreciated time to participate in Summit panels to update participants on upcoming legislative opportunities and challenges for the first session of the 113th Congress.

- **Senate and House Agriculture Committees: Chris Adamo, Brent Blevins and Anne Simmons**, gave their perspective on the current situation of the Farm Bill, including the impacts of the fiscal cliff deal on the Title II Conservation programs. The House relayed their disappointment with the lack of a final Farm Bill put into law in the 112th. They highlighted the similarities in the Title II programs under both the Senate and the House versions passed last Congress, and while those sections were close, the larger discussion and discrepancies revolved around the nutrition and commodity titles. They will be working on resolving these differences and making sure the bills can pass both chambers. Mr. Adamo highlighted work on the Regional Partnership Program (RPP), which began in 2008 with a trust fund idea. The RPP existed in the House and Senate versions of the Farm Bill in the 112th, which would focus on involving more private land owners into conservation practices. The RPP was slightly different in the House and Senate versions, although the goals and structure for the program were the same. Mr. Adamo encouraged folks to become more knowledgeable and involved in this issue, in order to bring involve

more than just ranchers and farmers in the discussion.

- **Senate and House Appropriations Committees: Rita Culp and Roger Cockrell (Senate) and Shalanda Young and Taunja Berquam (House)** provided perspectives from the Interior & Environment and Energy & Water subcommittees. The staffers noted their efforts to look at what remains for FY13 and thinking about how the FY14 process may work. Prospects for addressing the FY13 appropriations include another continuing resolution, an omnibus package, or a “cromnibus” that would combine a continuing resolution with more detailed lines on areas of compromise. The staff highlighted the uncertainty caused by the sequester and the inability to try to apportion cuts or funding without knowing where the overall levels of cuts or funding will need to be. Ms. Young noted the strong level of funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) at \$300 m and attributed much of that to the large support of members like Reps. LaTourette and McCollum. She noted Mr. Joyce’s involvement already on this issue, as he has secured a spot on the Interior & Environment Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the GLRI funds. On the Senate side, Ms. Culp noted Lisa Jackson’s resignation from the head of the EPA may slow down the process of considering the President’s FY14 budget request, when it is released. Although hearings could be held before the release of the budget or additional information, the hearings would be more thematic without concrete numbers for programs. The staff did highlight the Great Lakes appropriations letter as being one of the few bipartisan letters still received, which makes a difference to folks, as those are few and far between these days. Staff on the Energy & Water Subcommittee anticipated a continuing decline in the budget for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, although the various issues of water levels, ports, and dredging continue to be challenges. Ms. Berquam highlighted that the funding, under an across-the-board cut from sequestration would result in a budget of \$4.3 billion down from \$5.4 billion in 2010. With the caps set by the Budget-Control Act, both Ms. Berquam and Mr. Cockrell highlighted the difficulty of finding additional funds for the Army Corps. They noted the potential impacts of the [RAMP Act](#) and similar legislation would be difficult for the committees to absorb, as the caps prevent additional spending. Staff communicated that the full annual amount collected by the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, if required under law to go towards dredging, would have to be subtracted from what’s left of the cap for the non-defense part of the bill, which only totals \$16-17 billion. Thus, it would be a large endeavor to allocate those cuts among the other programs. Ms. Alice Yates, of Sen. Levin’s office who also re-introduced [legislation](#) addressing the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, highlighted their continued work with the committee to find a solution so as to not affect other line items. Concern was raised from the audience that, although some states are finding innovative solutions to fill the dredging and maintenance gap, these states should not be penalized by having funds taken away. The Committee staff conveyed their agreement that states should not be disincentivized from finding their own solutions, although they believed these projects were not going to receive funding in any case and additional cuts were not being scheduled for those states. Lastly, the staff highlighted the impacts of the emergency supplemental (Superstorm Sandy bill), which included \$3.5 billion for the Army Corps that was not attributed to

emergency spending. Thus this \$3.5 billion must come out of the allocation and cap, which could provoke a large shock to the system.

- **House Energy & Commerce Committee: Greg Dotson** provided insight into the priorities of the Committee moving forward, much of which revolves around energy generation. He noted the Majority would likely host hearings looking at the renewable fuel standard, the Keystone XL pipeline, oversight on regulations addressing climate change and hydraulic fracturing practices, as well as a focus on oil and gas production. He provided some insight, as well, into the Minority's priorities, highlighting reviews of what is known on climate science, given the multiple reports from the World Bank and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
- **House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee: Jon Pawlow and David Wegner** spoke at length on several measures the Committee will be considering, including a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), the State Revolving Fund programs, and the Government Accountability Organization's audit of the GLRI program. Mr. Pawlow highlighted the Committee's interest in developing a WRDA bill under the earmark moratorium without ceding authority to the executive branch. He noted the anticipation of language from the Senate as early as the end of the month, but emphasized the Committee's committal to not rush the bill to ensure passage through both chambers. Mr. Wegner highlighted four areas of interest including water quality and infrastructure, water levels management, intermodality of transportation (ship, rail, road), and invasive species. Staff agreed that invasive species and ballast water issues were complex and challenging, as legislators need to understand the level of technology for treatment systems. Both staffers highlighted the encouraging bipartisan start to the legislative session for the committee.

Additional Speakers

- **Senior Advisor to the EPA Administrator, Cameron Davis** spoke about the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and the work of the 16 federal agencies to achieve its goals. He specifically noted three areas of focus for continued funding, including cleaning up polluted and contaminated areas, non-point source pollution, and invasive species. Mr. Davis also highlighted the successful amendment of the Great Lakes Water Quality Act, and the desire to put into the amended agreement long-term plans and efforts to ensure the agreement does not become dated. Through discussion with the audience regarding the delisting of Areas of Concern, Mr. Davis agreed that some communities have had anxiety about delisting, fearing it would mean a complete cutoff from federal support and attention to issues. Mr. Davis agreed there was a real issue there to be concerned with but also an opportunity to plan for what could be gained once delisting occurs.
- **NEMWI President, Allegra Cangelosi** described new and existing projects at NEMWI that address Great Lakes-relevant issues. The Great Ships Initiative (GSI) continues to validate potential ballast treatment systems for their effectiveness in the fresh water environment of the Great Lakes and will be undertaking testing of systems in 2013. Visit

www.greatshipsinitiative.org for testing outcomes. Funded by the Great Lakes Protection Fund is a GSI effort to empirically estimate the relationship between densities of live organisms in ballast discharge to the risk of invasion in the environment (the risk-release relationship). In addition, NEMWI is investigating the availability of data on the region's water quality through a project with the U.S. Geological Survey. Ms. Cangelosi also noted the NEMWI Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative which is bolstering involvement by a new bipartisan and bicameral MS River Caucus. This new caucus could afford opportunities to the GLTFs to leverage support for national restoration efforts.

- Canadian Representative, **Sabrina Dadrian** provided an update on the upcoming work by the Canadian government, including a multi-national study on aquatic invasive species. This work will inform further development of federal regulations addressing impending invasions, including one out for public comment. The government will be implementing the international ballast water standards by 2016.

Roundtable Discussion

A roundtable discussion in the afternoon provided for open dialogue on federal policy opportunities raised by the various speakers. The main topics of the roundtable discussion were the appropriate future emphasis of the GLRI, and the Great Lakes Governors' Summit scheduled for Summer 2013. Participants expressed their interest in continued GLRI activities in the region, but noted the need for continued enforcement and support for agency programs as well. Participants discussed the opportunities associated with, and need for, greater resolution in the non-point source control aspects of the GLRI. They also discussed weather disasters and the region's readiness for the possibility of continued low lake levels. Participants agreed the Governors' Summit was an opportunity to provide information and insight to the states and provinces in attendance on opportunities for collaboration and progress in the Great Lakes.