

Great Lakes Hill Happenings

AUGUST 2015



UPCOMING EVENTS

Great Lakes Commission Annual Meeting
Sept 28-29
Chicago, IL

Great Lakes Restoration Conference
Sept 29-Oct 1
Chicago, IL

July Wraps Up on the Hill

The House wrapped up its work period at the end of July, while the Senate will be working into the first week of August. Then both Chambers will not be back in DC until after Labor Day, providing many opportunities for Capitol Hill leaders to see the results of their and constituents' work within the Great Lakes region. Movement on spending bills came to a standstill but transit funding continued despite a threatened expiration; leaders came together on Lake Erie while authorization of the GLRI program moved a step closer. . Details inside!

NEMWI Hill Briefing on Water Monitoring "Overflows"

Following the release of NEMWI's study on water quality monitoring in the Lake Erie drainage basin, the Institute hosted a Capitol Hill briefing on July 14 to provide an overview of the study's recommendations for improving water quality monitoring. Elin Betanzo, Senior Policy Analyst at NEMWI and lead author of the study, provided an overview of the study's findings for the Lake Erie drainage basin. Larry Antosch of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and Lana Pollack of the International Joint Commission joined the briefing to share their perspectives on the study and water data needs for Lake Erie. The speakers agreed that efficient, effective, and coordinated monitoring is

essential for evaluating agricultural management practices to improve the health of Lake Erie. Interested Congressional offices, industry, environmental advocates, states, and other interested parties overflowed the Capitol Visitor Center room, as the speakers discussed the study's merits in helping states and the region achieve the 40% phosphorus reduction targets. As part of outreach efforts, NEMWI has been discussing the study's findings with regional parties, including the Nutrients Annex 4 Subcommittee for the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, the Ohio Environmental Council,

Congressional offices, and the Great Lakes & St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, whose mayors endorsed the state and provincial efforts to protect Lake Erie.

Report materials, including a brief two-pager and map of the study as well as slides from the Hill briefing, can be found at the [NEMWI website](#)

A recording of the technical presentation to the Annex 4 Subcommittee can be found [here](#).

August and September tend to be months for high algal blooms in Lake Erie, which have already begun to appear. The NEMWI work looks to help the region understand what effect agricultural management practices have on water quality.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Legislative Updates	2
GAO 2nd Report on the GLRI	2
FY2016 Appropriations	3
Great Lakes Note	4

Legislative Updates



Harmful Algal Bloom near Toledo, Ohio, August, 2014. Photo courtesy of NOAA

Great Lakes Assurance Program

Verification Act (H.R. 3120): Lead Co-sponsors include Reps. Candice Miller (R-MI) and Tim Walberg (R-MI); provides for a pilot version for the Great Lakes basin of the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program, which encourages voluntary agricultural assurance programs to promote conservation and minimize agricultural pollution

Letter Encouraging Funding for the Army Corps in the Great Lakes in FY2017: The Great Lakes Task Force Co-Chairs sent a letter to Assistant Secretary of the Army

for Civil Works, Jo-Ellen Darcy, requesting funding for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in FY2017 to support the Great Lakes Navigation System, and especially the Soo Locks, as well as the Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program. Signed by all of the Co-Chairs, Reps. Candice Miller (R-MI), Marcy Kaptur (D-OH), Sean Duffy (R-WI), and Louise Slaughter (D-NY), the letter highlights the unique value of the Great Lakes and the necessary federal support provided through these programs.

The text of the letter can be found [here](#).

GAO Releases Second Report on the GLRI Program

The NEMWI helped coordinate a pre-release briefing for Congressional staff on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) 2nd Report on the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Program.

Highlights from the report and the presentation include:

- There are no recommendations to EPA from GAO included in this report. The draft report did include recommendations regarding improvements and accuracies in the Great Lakes Accountability System, which is used by the agencies and recipients to track and input data on the projects, including recipients, funding provided, project status, and completion date. GAO identified concerns with these specific categories, noting inconsistencies due to confusing guidance for entry and entry errors.
- EPA rolled out a new system, known as the Environmental Accomplishments in the Great Lakes (EAGL) information system, in May 2015, that will include the recommended improvements by the beginning of FY2016.
- GAO recommended that OMB provide the cross-cut budget analysis for all investments in Great Lakes restoration efforts, including the GLRI program, as required under multiple statutes. OMB responded that the amount of work needed to fulfill the request and the delay in the data would make the report nearly useless for oversight efforts.
- The report reviews 19 specific projects and the general processes the agencies make to determine priority areas and how projects are selected.
- All agencies used existing process to determine their priorities, on an individual and interagency level (using the Interagency Task Force), and select projects.
- The agencies have done a good job of allocating and obligating the appropriated funds from Congress, though actual spending has lagged slightly behind.
- Of the \$1.68 billion appropriated by Congress from FY2010-14, \$1.66 billion (98.8%) has been allocated among the agencies; \$1.61 billion (95.8%) has been obligated; \$1.15 billion (69%) has been spent.
- Reasons for lower spending levels include multi-year projects, a "field season" (winter!), and the ability for grants to be spent on projects, including monitoring of success, for up to 7 years.

The report, available [here](#), follows an earlier report released in November 2013. Both the House and Senate have introduced bills that would authorize the GLRI Program through FY2020. The GLRI Program has provided nearly \$2 billion for restoration efforts in the Great Lakes, delisting multiple Areas of Concern, managing nutrients, combatting invasive species, and restoring wetlands and other habitat.

FY2016 Appropriations

The House and Senate continued reviewing and planning the federal government's spending for FY2016; however, all activity on funding bills has stalled, having hit roadblocks in the House and Senate. Though no further action is expected, NEMWI summaries are linked below with notable policy provisions for the region highlighted.

Energy and Water

Funds: Department of Energy and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Regional Significance: Supports maritime navigation and trade, as well as ecosystem restoration efforts and energy research and development

Status in [House](#): PASSED full House

Status in [Senate](#): Passed out of Committee

Policy Provisions: Open-lake disposal restrictions for Lake Erie (House) or in general (Senate); increased funding for Operations and Maintenance of Harbors and waterways; House provided \$10 million for Army Corps' Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration program (Rep. Sean Duffy (WI-07) floor amendment)

Commerce, Justice, Science

Funds: Department of Commerce, including National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Regional Significance: Supports manufacturing programs and NOAA's observation and research efforts, including on algal blooms

Status in [House](#): PASSED full House

Status in [Senate](#): Passed out of Committee

Policy Provisions: Increased funding for NOAA's satellite program; includes funding for the Advanced Manufacturing Initiative and implementation of the Revitalize American Manufacturing and Innovation Act; funding also provided for coal-mining communities

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development

Funds: Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development

Regional Significance: Supports transportation infrastructure, including TIGER, as well as community development programs like Community Development Block Grants; St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corp.

Status in [House](#): PASSED full House

Status in [Senate](#): Passed out of Committee

Policy Provisions: Decreases in many programs including Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, Tenant-Based Rental Assistance, and Federal Railroad Administration; encourages a study on marine highway infrastructure and its impact on performance of national transportation

Interior and Environment

Funds: Department of Interior and Environmental Protection Agency

Regional Significance: Supports U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey restoration, research, and monitoring; provides funding for Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Brownfields, and State Revolving Funds

Status in [House](#): Consideration on House floor stalled

Status in [Senate](#): Passed out of Committee

Policy Provisions: Decreases in many EPA programs, though GLRI remained at \$300 M; level or decreased funding for many Interior programs though invasive species received a small bump in the Senate; policy riders for EPA rule-makings including Waters of the U.S.

Great Lakes Note

August is a quieter time in Washington, DC, due to the month-long recess. However, it also provides unique opportunities for members to directly experience the many happenings within their districts and states. The fall looks to be a busy and chaotic time, given the impending funding crisis, debt ceiling, expiration (again) of the Highway Trust Fund, and debate on other issues.

Stay tune for further updates via the NEMWI's website, www.nemw.org



The Great Lakes Washington Program advances Great Lakes Protection and Restoration objectives by creating a strong interface between activities of Great Lakes leadership in the region and federal leaders in Washington – particularly Great Lakes Congressional delegation members. The program follows in the goals of the Northeast-Midwest, a Washington-based nonprofit and nonpartisan research, education, and policy organization dedicated to economic vitality, environmental quality, and regional equity for Northeast and Midwest states.

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Strengthening the Region that Sustains the Nation

