



Western Reserve Land Conservancy

land • people • community

Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony for HCR 14. My name is Milan Tropf and I am the Public Policy Manager at Western Reserve Land Conservancy. We are the largest land trust in the state, serving a 29-county region which stretches from Sandusky Bay to the Pennsylvania border, and from Lake Erie to Jefferson and Knox counties. Our work is focused on conserving natural areas and working farms as well as revitalizing urban communities.

Ohio is home to one of the Earth's greatest natural resources: the Great Lakes. Lake Erie provides countless environmental, recreational, and health benefits to our region. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) has invested in targeting threats such as invasive species, habitat destruction, toxic substances, and algae blooms to our beautiful Great Lakes over the last two decades. Thanks to Governor DeWine and the General Assembly for establishing the H2Ohio program which has been a remarkable success so far in combating harmful runoff and preventing the algae bloom situation on Lake Erie from getting worse.

However, there is still more work to be done to protect Lake Erie and its tributaries. Even though these threats have been addressed, they are still pervasive. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2024 would reauthorize the program for an additional five years and provide a \$25 million increase in funding to the program. Projects are competitively awarded throughout the Great Lakes region and further funding would allow for more projects to get completed. This vital program provides a federal investment over the next five years to protect Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes.

Western Reserve Land Conservancy has received GLRI funding on dozens of construction projects, many of which are located on State Scenic Rivers. We see the need every day to permanently restore and protect properties along Lake Erie's coastline and waterways. GLRI is a critical tool in our public funding toolbox. Paired with H2Ohio and other conservation programs, GLRI provides a necessary funding match to complete conservation and restoration projects.

We thank Representatives Patton and Skindell for sponsoring this legislation. We hope Congress will pass this bipartisan legislation before the year's end. Thank you for your time and I encourage you to favorably support HCR 14.