



Testimony before the Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

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Regarding
H.C.R. 14
December 3, 2024

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, and Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, thank you for holding a hearing on H.C. R 14 to urge the United States Congress to enact the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Act of 2024.

My name is Joy Mulinex, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission. The mission of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission is to protect and restore Lake Erie's natural resources, its waters and ecosystem and to promote economic development of the region. Restoring Lake Erie's water quality is one of Governor DeWine's top priorities, and the Commission continues to work closely with our agency partners, the research community, and many other groups and individuals to make improvements to Ohio's Great Lake. Lake Erie continues to be a draw for recreational tourism, serving as the Walleye Capital of the world. While Lake Erie is a tremendous natural resource, harmful algal blooms continue to be the largest issue facing Lake Erie, meaning there is more work to be done.

The Great Lakes are a unique natural resource that provide drinking water to over 40 million people, provide habitat for over 3,500 plants and animals, and contribute significantly to the regional economy. Because of the important role that the GLRI has played in protecting and restoring Lake Erie, I appreciate the efforts of the authors of H.C.R. 14.

The Ohio Lake Erie Commission works to coordinate among the Commission's agencies to provide input on U.S. EPA's GLRI Action Plan and to utilize GLRI funding. GLRI resources have helped expedite restoration activities at Areas of Concern (AOC) which are designated sites that have historic pollution and degradation. GLRI funded management actions that led to the delisting of the Ashtabula River AOC, Ohio's first AOC delisting, in 2021. GLRI continues to fund remaining management actions at Ohio's three remaining AOCs—the Maumee, Black and Cuyahoga Rivers—so that those rivers can also be delisted.

There are four species of carp, native to Asia, that are invasive and dangerous to Ohio, Lake Erie, and the Great Lakes system. Should invasive carp become established in inland waters or Lake Erie, they have the potential to outcompete and reduce the numbers of

game fish in Ohio's waters which will negatively impact Ohio's anglers and the businesses that rely on these resources. After researchers identified high risk potential pathways between the Ohio River basin and the Lake Erie basin in Ohio, GLRI funding supported projects to sever these pathways where invasive carp could enter Lake Erie.

To help minimize the amount of nutrients entering Lake Erie and feeding harmful algal blooms, the GLRI has provided funds to several projects including building additional wetlands such as Clark and Delaware/Horseshoe Islands Restoration Project. This unique project will rebuild Clark and Delaware/Horseshoe which have deteriorated over the years due to erosion. The process of restoring the islands will improve water quality by reducing sediment and nutrients in the Maumee River and ultimately Lake Erie as well as provide valuable fish and wildlife habitat.

Other GLRI-funded nutrients management projects in the Western Lake Erie Basin include projects for drainage water management, technical assistance, two-stage ditches, farmer to farmer peer advocacy, and advance farm technology.

Earlier this year, the Lake Erie Commission passed the following resolution to support reauthorization of the GLRI.

GLRI Resolution of Support

WHEREAS, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) has been a valuable tool for almost 15 years to coordinate, accelerate, and fund restoration and protection work throughout the Great Lakes, the largest system of surface fresh water.

WHEREAS, the Ohio Lake Erie Commission appreciates the bipartisan work of the Great Lakes Congressional delegation in its efforts to secure a continuation of authority and funds for the GLRI.

Since its creation in 2010, Congress has appropriated over \$3.7 billion in GLRI funding which has been invested across the eight-state region in more than 7,500 restoration projects.

WHEREAS, a 2018 independent economic study found that for every dollar spent on GLRI, there was an additional \$3.35 of economic activity. This economic study further found that the GLRI has greatly improved the Great Lakes tourism economy, approximately half of the economic activity generated by GLRI spending benefits economic activity for tourism. Additionally, the authors concluded there were widespread benefits as a result of GLRI project spending which included new businesses, new jobs, and more water-based recreation, and the value of homes in coastal communities increased due to GLRI investments.

WHEREAS, hundreds of GLRI restoration projects in Ohio have received over \$280 million between FY-2010 and FY-2022.

WHEREAS, GLRI projects must support one of the GLRI focus areas:

- Toxic Substances and Areas of Concern
- Invasive Species
- Nonpoint Source Pollution Impacts on Nearshore Health (formerly Nearshore Health and Nonpoint Source Pollution)
- Habitat and Species (formerly Habitat and Wildlife Protection and Restoration)
- Foundations for Future Restoration Actions (formerly Accountability, Education, Monitoring, Evaluation, Communication and Partnerships)

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Ohio Lake Erie Commission urges the U.S. Congress to enact legislation to reauthorize the GLRI.

In closing, the GLRI has promoted restoration work throughout the eight-state region and invested hundreds of millions into the lakes. The investment in Lake Erie has also been tremendous, addressing historic pollution as well as evolving challenges like invasive carp. The return on the investment has been significant. When the Great Lakes are healthy, the region's economy also does well.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.