



A Pivotal Year for Wildlife and Communities in the Great Lakes

2022 CONGRESSIONAL PRIORITIES REPORT



Wildlife, people, and communities rely on clean, healthy water. We literally cannot live without the precious water resources that define our region—including the Great Lakes, Upper Mississippi River, Ohio River, Boundary waters and multitudes of smaller streams, rivers and wetlands. Accordingly, the staff at NWF's Great Lakes Regional Center are committed as ever to being a uniting, effective voice for wildlife, people, and water. We continue to lead on Great Lakes and water protection efforts to protect fish and wildlife and our outdoor traditions, and to protect and improve the quality of life of people and communities who call this region home.

There is no question that 2022 is going to be a busy and pivotal year. Let's take a look at what progress we have made to date since we launched our [2021 Congressional priorities](#) last January, and what our updated priorities look like for the days and months ahead.

Protecting and Restoring the Great Lakes

The Great Lakes are vital to the region's economy and way of life. They encompass 95% of North America's freshwater and over 40 million people rely on them for drinking water. Protecting and restoring the Great Lakes ecosystem will benefit our economy, people, and the fish and wildlife that call the region home.



Great Lakes Restoration

PROGRESS: Nothing brings us together more than protecting and restoring the Great Lakes. While the Great Lakes continue to face toxic contamination, polluted runoff, invasive species, habitat destruction, and loss of wetlands, among other threats, Congress responded by adding an additional \$1 billion for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative in the infrastructure bill signed into law by President Biden late last year. These additional funds will accelerate the clean-up of some of the most contaminated sites in the region and are in addition to the annual funding for habitat restoration, nutrient reduction, and removal of invasive species.

REQUEST: GLRI is producing results for people and communities across the region. Increase annual GLRI funding to \$400 million per year.

Staff contact: [Laura Rubin, rubinL@nwf.org](mailto:laurarubin@nwf.org)



Stop the Spread of Invasive Species

PROGRESS: In late 2020, Congress authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to rebuild the Brandon Road Lock and Dam near Joliet, Illinois, to block the advance of invasive carp toward Lake Michigan. In late 2021, all of the Great Lakes Governors came out in strong support for making the Brandon Road project truly a national priority that is 100% federally funded. In early 2022, the Corps allocated \$226 million from the infrastructure and jobs bill to finish the remaining design phase (PED) AND the first year of construction at Brandon Road. This is a significant first down payment towards making this project a reality.



REQUEST: Adjust the current cost share of the Brandon Road project from 80%-20% to a full federal project in the next Water Resources Development Act or other legislative vehicles.

Staff contact: [Marc Smith, msmith@nwf.org](mailto:mmsmith@nwf.org)

Protecting the Great Lakes from Harmful Algal Blooms

PROGRESS: Key commitments have been made by state and national leaders to meet the needed 40% reduction in nutrient loading to Lake Erie. However, while some progress is underway, it is patchy, incremental and slow, and not at a scale that is responsive to the scope of the problem. There is no singular fix or action that will achieve the 40% reduction and an array of policies and programs are needed to realize a clean Lake Erie.

REQUEST: Agricultural conservation programs must be fully funded to address nutrient management at multiple intervention points, including within the Farm Bill.

Staff contact: [Gail Hesse, hesseg@nwf.org](mailto:gailhesse@nwf.org)



Securing Water and Wildlife Conservation through the Farm Bill

PROGRESS: Congress is in the early stages of developing the next Farm Bill. This is the single largest federal legislation for conservation on private working lands that Congress writes.

REQUEST: Develop a strong conservation title in the 2023 Farm Bill that provides needed technical and financial assistance to enable farmers and ranchers to adopt practices that benefit fish, wildlife and water quality in the Great Lakes. In addition, the next Farm Bill needs to increase adoption of best management practices like cover crops, and promote and increase climate resiliency efforts on working lands.

Staff contact: Marc Smith, msmith@nwf.org

Remove Line 5 Oil Pipeline from the Great Lakes

PROGRESS: Enbridge Energy's nearly 70 year old oil pipeline, Line 5, lies on the bottom of the Straits of Mackinac in the Great Lakes. Researchers have called the location of Line 5 as "the worst possible place for an oil spill". In November of 2020, Michigan revoked the easement for Line 5 due to the unacceptable risk the pipeline poses to our fresh drinking water and Tribal rights. Today, Enbridge is undermining state rights to protect land and water as they continue to operate Line 5 illegally while obstructing legal efforts to shut the pipeline down.

REQUEST: Support the state of Michigan's authority and responsibility to protect the Great Lakes and public trust.

Staff Contact: Beth Wallace, wallaceb@nwf.org



Safeguarding Our Drinking Water

Wildlife rely on clean, healthy water, as do people. It is paramount that we secure clean drinking water protections so that all people have access to clean, safe, and affordable water.

Restoring and Strengthening the Clean Water Act

PROGRESS: More than 117 million people in the United States depend on drinking water sources that are fed in part by streams and wetlands. The U.S. EPA and Army Corps of Engineers are currently taking official comments on a new rule to define “waters of the U.S.” The outcome of this rule-making will determine the level of environmental protections for several classifications of streams and wetlands. The recent news that the U.S. Supreme Court will take this case up adds additional uncertainty to a final resolution of this ongoing effort to uphold the water protections that the Clean Water Act provides.



REQUEST: Support the Biden Administration’s proposal to return to the pre-2015 Waters of the U.S. approach, which is significantly better than the former administration’s unlawful Navigable Waters Protection Rule, that threatened the degradation and destruction of rivers and wetlands.

Staff contact: [Laura Rubin, rubinL@nwf.org](mailto:rubinL@nwf.org)

Improving Water Infrastructure and Affordability

PROGRESS: The bi-partisan infrastructure bill signed into law late last year is a historic investment of resources for improving water infrastructure and affordability. Over \$23 billion will be enacted and over \$43 billion is authorized. This represents a reversal of many years of disinvestment with the single largest federal investment in water infrastructure in our nation’s history. The law sets up a strong framework to work toward equitable distribution by greatly increasing the number of grants (as opposed to loans) and by setting out environmental justice principles.

REQUEST: Pass specific provisions of the Build Back Better Act that would potentially provide an additional \$10 billion in investment for lead service line replacement.

Staff contact: [Mike Shriberg, shribergm@nwf.org](mailto:shribergm@nwf.org)

Protecting People and Wildlife From PFAS

PROGRESS: PFASs continues to pose a serious risk to people and wildlife. The bi-partisan PFAS Action Act passed out of the House. This bill would require the EPA to determine whether PFAS chemicals should be designated as toxic pollutants under the Clean Water Act, require issuance of a federal drinking water standard, and would designate PFOS and PFOA as hazardous substances under CERCLA (the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act). In addition, The National Defense Authorization Act passed in December of 2021 included \$476 million for environmental remediation at PFAS contaminated military sites across the country, including sites within the Great Lakes region. Moreover, the EPA released the first ever PFAS Road Map, directing over 10 agencies across the federal government to comprehensively address PFAS impacts to people.

REQUEST: Introduce and pass the PFAS Action Act in the Senate; increase the Department of Defense budget that reallocates resources to states to cleanup PFAS contaminated sites (such as Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Michigan); and increase appropriations for federal agencies to conduct research for PFAS tissue sampling in fish and wildlife.

Staff contact: [Jennifer Hill, hillj@nwf.org](mailto:hillj@nwf.org)



Protecting and Restoring the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers

The Ohio River is a working river that is home to more than 25 million people, many of whom depend on it as an economic engine, a source of drinking water, and a place of recreation. The Mississippi River, a cultural and national treasure, runs through 10 states, drains 41 percent of the continental United States and carries more water than any other American river. It provides drinking water, recreation, and a source of commerce for millions of people. Both these rivers face unprecedented challenges that require robust Congressional investment.



Ohio River Restoration

PROGRESS: The National Wildlife Federation is leading a multi-stakeholder workgroup charged with crafting a restoration and protection action plan for the 14-state Ohio River basin ecosystem. Workgroup members hail from state and federal agencies, academia, business, industry, and non-governmental institutions. The science-based Ohio River restoration plan will be delivered to the U.S. Congress in late 2022. The goal is to establish a federally funded restoration program for the Ohio River basin, similar to federal initiatives to restore the Chesapeake Bay, Florida Everglades, Great Lakes, and other iconic U.S. waters.

Staff Contact: [Jordan Lubetkin, lubetkin@nwf.org](mailto:jordan.lubetkin@nwf.org)

Mississippi River Restoration

PROGRESS: H.R. 4202, Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative Act (MRRRI Act) was introduced by Rep. Betty McCollum last year. This historic bill will establish the Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative [MRRRI] aimed at protecting and restoring the ecological health and resilience of the Mississippi River for current and succeeding generations of Americans and for the fish and wildlife that rely on the Mississippi River and its floodplain.

REQUEST: Support the MRRRI Act and encourage the introduction of a companion bill in the Senate.

Staff contact: [Marc Smith, msmith@nwf.org](mailto:marc.smith@nwf.org)

Improving Management of Our Public Lands and Wildlife

In 2020, Congress passed the Great American Outdoors Act that will help improve fish and wildlife habitat, and fund support of outdoor recreation and access on National Parks and public lands across the Great Lakes region and country. Despite this historic achievement, wildlife, their associated habitats, and our hunting and fishing heritage remain at risk. The increased threat of privatization of public land, the public's ability to safely and equitably access the out-of-doors, wildlife disease, and habitat destruction continue to threaten our region's fish and wildlife.

Pass Recovering America's Wildlife Act

PROGRESS: The Recovering America's Wildlife Act, RAWA, (H.R. 2773; S. 2372), introduced by Representatives Debbie Dingell (D-Michigan) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-Nebraska) in the U.S. House and Senators Martin Heinrich (D-New Mexico) and Roy Blunt (R-Missouri) in the U.S. Senate, will bring much-needed resources to wildlife professionals tasked with conserving the diversity of America's native species. These resources will fund multi-stakeholder efforts to conserve and monitor these at-risk species, known in states as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), in order to work toward reversing population declines. In January 2022, the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources voted to advance the Recovering America's Wildlife Act with a bipartisan 29-15 vote.

REQUEST: Pass RAWA and secure protections for wildlife now and for future generations.

Staff contact: Marc Smith, msmith@nwf.org



Support the Boundary Waters Canoe Area

PROGRESS: The Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act (H.R. 2794), introduced by Representative McCollum (D-Minnesota), will protect the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Voyageurs National Park from sulfide-ore mining. While the recent cancellation of the existing leases is a welcomed and hard-fought development, it does not assure the long-term protection of the Nation's most-visited wilderness area. H.R. 2794 permanently protects the 234,328 acres of federal lands and waters adjacent to and within the headwaters of the BWCA from all future permitting for risky sulfide-ore copper mining. In addition, the legislation does not limit taconite or iron-ore mining within Minnesota, nor does it affect sulfide-ore copper mining projects outside the Rainy River Drainage Basin. The carefully crafted legislation also will not interfere with state mineral leasing, state environmental regulations, or state permitting processes.

REQUEST: Pass the Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act to protect the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Voyageurs National Park.

Staff contact: Jason Dinsmore, dinsmorej@nwf.org

Mobilizing the Next Generation of Stewards

One of the best ways to get the U.S. economy moving again is to offer millions of Americans—especially youth of all backgrounds—jobs in a 21st century Civilian Conservation Corps. The work will improve degraded wildlife habitat; restore and reconnect forests, grasslands and wetlands; clean up waterways; improve recreational areas; make communities more resilient to climate impacts and remediate environmental injustices.

Climate Conservation Corps

PROGRESS: President Biden signed an executive order establishing the framework for the first-ever Civilian Climate Corps. Billions in funding for the CCC is in the Building Back Better bill (BBB), which is pending in the U.S. Senate.

REQUEST: Support funding for the CCC either in the BBB or in other separate appropriation bills.

Staff contact: [Mike Shriberg, shribergm@nwf.org](mailto:shribergm@nwf.org)



Advancing Climate Solutions and Resiliency

Adding to the numerous challenges facing the Great Lakes region, climate change threatens to disrupt our economy, have disproportionate impacts on people of color and underserved communities, harms fish and wildlife, and our way of life. Strengthening our coastal community's ability to adapt to changing water levels, restoring wildlife habitat, and transforming our energy policies are the best path forward to address the adverse impacts of a changing climate.

Advance Climate Policies

PROGRESS: The recently passed Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act addressed conservation and climate resilience with investments in wildfire prevention and firefighting (\$3.4 billion), forest ecosystem restoration (\$2.1 billion); water investment including conservation for healthy rivers and fish and wildlife habitat (\$8.3 billion); ecosystem restoration (\$2.13 billion including \$1 billion specific to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative); flood reduction investments (\$3.5 billion); and wildlife crossings (\$350 million).



In addition, this law made an initial investment in promoting carbon reduction through investments in the EV charging network, EV battery manufacturing, renewable energy, the electric grid, orphan well cleanup, abandoned mine reclamation, and weatherization among other programs.

REQUEST: Pass additional investments that are currently part of the Build Back Better Act:

- \$550 billion investment in carbon reduction including investments in tax credits for EVs, USPS and GSA green vehicles, manufacturing and clean energy tax credits, building energy efficiency, methane reduction, repeal of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Oil and Gas program, and programs to reduce the leases, drilling, and subsidies for fossil fuels;
- Climate adaptation for wildfire management (\$15 billion);
- Healthy forests (\$15.5 billion);
- Coastal restoration (\$6 billion);
- Biodiversity through the Endangered Species Act and for wildlife refuges and state wildlife management areas (\$450 million);
- Regenerative agriculture (\$4 billion); and
- Urban parks (\$100 million).

Staff contact: *Denise Poloyac*, poloyacd@nwf.org

Strengthen Coastal Resiliency

PROGRESS: Fund the implementation of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study to develop a collaborative, risk-based decision framework that identifies opportunities to improve coastal resilience in the Great Lakes region. The study was authorized in the Water Resources Development Act of 2020. The study's goal is to develop a regional plan to improve shoreline resilience for both the man-made and natural environment. This effort will include an evaluation of shoreline infrastructure such as breakwaters, jetties, and seawalls.

Staff contact: *Marc Smith*, msmith@nwf.org



Moving Forward

2022 is off and running, and the staff at the Great Lakes Regional Center have great optimism. Our collaborative and pragmatic approach to our efforts to protect the Great Lakes continue, without pause. We are up to this challenge. Together, we can create a Great Lakes region where fish and wildlife thrive; where all people have access to affordable, safe and clean water; and where everyone can connect with the outdoors and enjoy the abundant wildlife and wild places here in the Great Lakes region.



For more information, please contact
Marc Smith, Policy Director, at msmith@nwf.org



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213 W. Liberty Street, Suite 200, Ann Arbor, MI 48104

www.nwf.org/greatlakes
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