

**TESTIMONY OF  
CHRIS KORLESKI, DIRECTOR  
GREAT LAKES NATIONAL PROGRAM OFFICE  
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

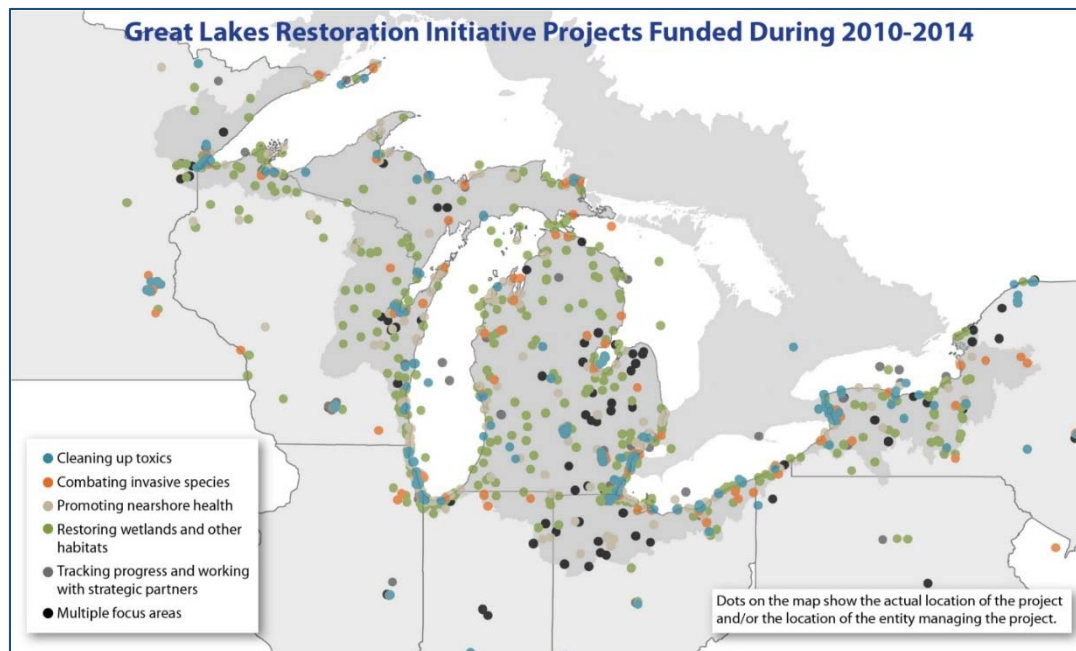
**BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT,  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**September 30, 2015**

Good Morning Chairman Gibbs and Ranking Member Napolitano, and members of the Committee. My name is Chris Korleski and I serve as the Director of the U.S. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office in Chicago. I am very pleased to be here this morning to discuss the remarkable progress made under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI).

The GLRI was launched in 2010 to accelerate efforts to protect and restore the largest system of fresh surface water in the world — to provide additional resources to make progress toward the most critical long-term goals for this important ecosystem.

Restoring and protecting the Great Lakes is not just a regional imperative; it is a national one. The lakes hold 90 to 95 percent of the nation's fresh surface water supply providing ecological and public health benefits, as well as direct economic and recreational benefits, to tens of millions of American citizens (including members of Tribal nations) who live in the Great Lakes basin.



Since its inception, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has been a catalyst for unprecedented federal agency coordination — through the GLRI Interagency Task Force and the GLRI Regional Working Group, both of which are led by EPA. This unprecedented coordination has produced unprecedented results. GLRI resources have supplemented agency base budgets to fund over 2,600 projects to improve water quality, to protect and restore native habitat and species, to prevent and control invasive species and to address other Great Lakes environmental problems.

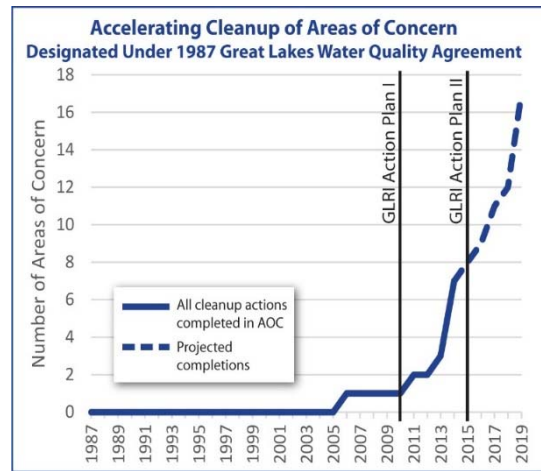
The GLRI Interagency Task Force and Regional Working Group work very hard to ensure that the Initiative: identifies the key threats to the Great Lakes ecosystem; ensures that the projects funded address those key threats; assesses projects using measures of progress to ensure that the Initiative is actually achieving results; and communicates those results through

a *Report to Congress and the President*. In addition, the Task Force and Working Group ensure that these activities are undertaken with the input of key stakeholders.

This coordinated effort is showing results:

### Toxic Substances and Areas of Concern<sup>1</sup>

During the first five years of the GLRI, federal agencies and their partners delisted three Areas of Concern (Presque Isle Bay in Pennsylvania and Deer Lake and White Lake in Michigan) and completed all of the initial work that will lead to the delisting of three additional Areas of Concern (Sheboygan River in Wisconsin, Waukegan



Harbor in Illinois, and Ashtabula River in Ohio). That’s a major change from the 25 years

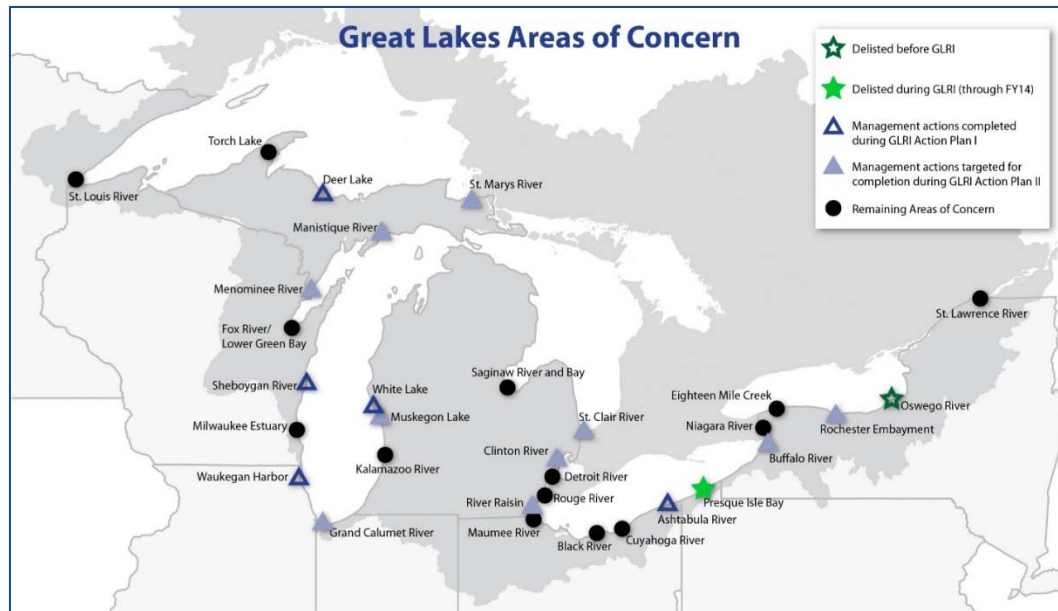
before the Initiative, during which only one Area of Concern was cleaned up and delisted.

With continued funding and the continued coordination of all our federal and state partners,

we hope to keep the momentum going and ultimately achieve the delisting of all the

remaining Areas of Concern.

<sup>1</sup> "Areas of Concern" (AOCs) were designated under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 1987 due to large amounts of legacy contaminants, primarily from industrial sources. There are 43 separate AOCs: 26 in the U.S., 12 in Canada, and 5 bi-national.



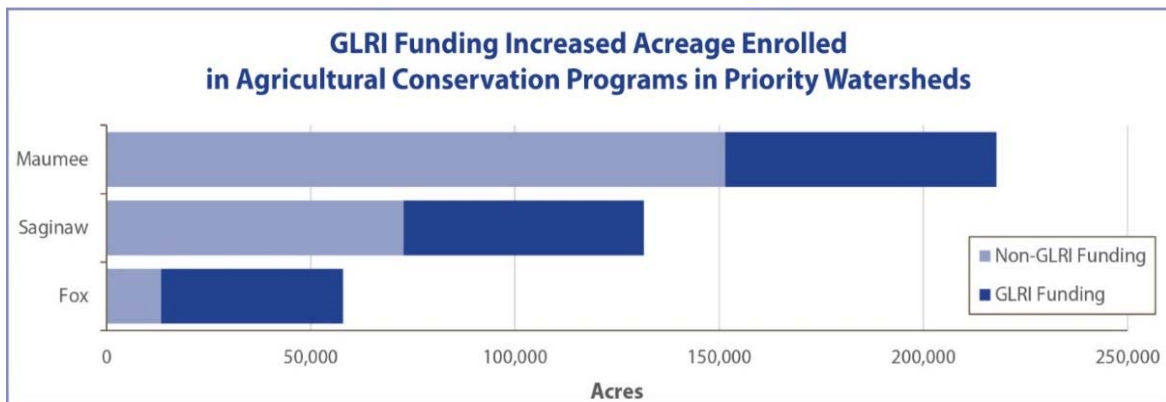
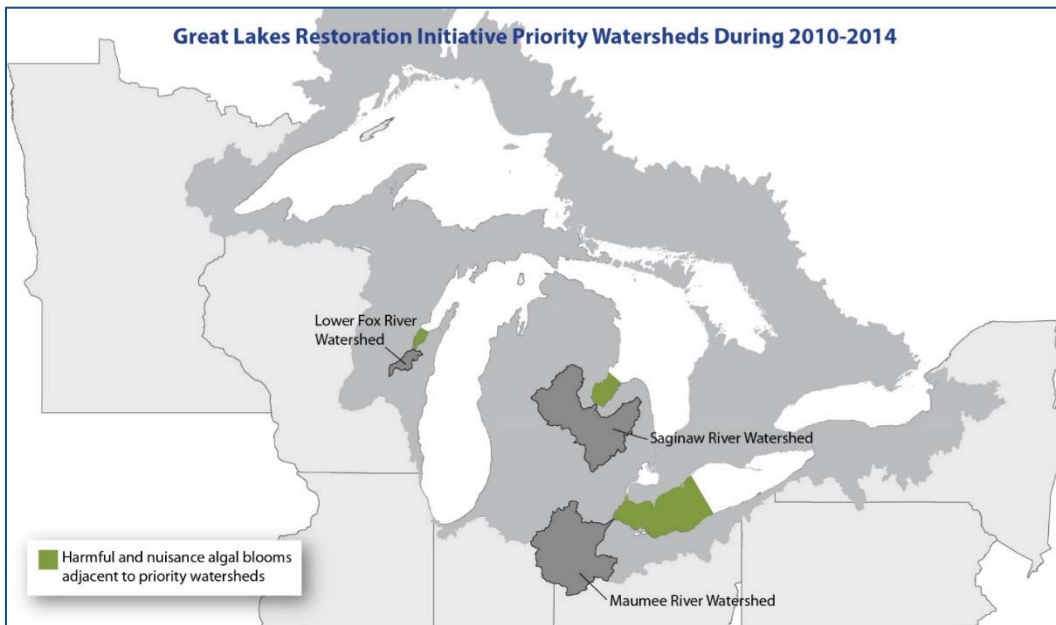
## Invasive Species

During the first five years of the GLRI, federal agencies and their partners engaged in an unprecedented level of activity to prevent new introductions of invasive species in the Great Lakes ecosystem. Some of this activity was focused on Asian carp, which are a significant threat to the ecological health of the Great Lakes and its multi-billion dollar sport fishery. The GLRI provides support to the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee to prevent bighead and silver carp from becoming established in the Great Lakes ecosystem; to date, monitoring has not found any established self-sustaining populations of silver or bighead carp. Nevertheless, the threat of Asian carp entering the Great Lakes continues, and the federal partners are eager to continue the work necessary to keep them out of the Great Lakes.

Agencies and their partners also controlled over 84,000 acres of property for terrestrial invasive species such as Japanese knotweed, Phragmites and purple loosestrife.

## Nearshore Health and Nonpoint Source Pollution

During the first five years of the GLRI, federal agencies and their partners targeted activities to reduce phosphorus runoff from farmland, which contributes to harmful algal blooms in western Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay and Green Bay. Federal agencies used GLRI support to increase the number of acres of farmland enrolled in agricultural conservation programs in GLRI priority watersheds by more than 70 percent.



### **Habitat and Wildlife Protection and Restoration**

During the first five years of the GLRI, more than 100,000 acres of wetlands and 48,000 acres of coastal, upland, and island habitat were protected, restored and enhanced. Over 500 barriers were removed or bypassed in Great Lakes tributaries, enabling access by fish and other aquatic organisms to over 3,400 additional miles of river. These activities have accelerated the restoration of native fish and wildlife populations to self-sustaining levels.

### **Accountability, Education, Monitoring, Evaluation, Communication and Partnerships**

During the first five years of the GLRI, less than a quarter of one percent (<0.25%) of GLRI funding was used to implement “teach the teacher” activities and help science teachers throughout the basin incorporate Great Lakes-specific material into their class curricula.

The July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015 *Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Report to Congress and the President* provides detailed progress on each focus area for fiscal years 2010-2014<sup>2</sup>. It also includes detailed information on funding and overall performance on Action Plan measures of progress, objectives and long-term goals.

While the first five years of the GLRI have achieved remarkable progress, the federal agencies are already well underway implementing *GLRI Action Plan II*<sup>3</sup>, which summarizes

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<sup>2</sup> *Great Lakes Restoration Initiative – Report to Congress and the President, Fiscal Years 2010-2014* (July 28, 2015): [http://glri.us/pdfs/21050720-report\\_to\\_congress.pdf](http://glri.us/pdfs/21050720-report_to_congress.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Great Lakes Restoration Initiative – Action Plan II* (September 2014): <http://glri.us/actionplan/pdfs/glri-action-plan-2.pdf>

the actions federal agencies will implement during fiscal years 2015 through 2019. These actions will build on restoration and protection work carried out under the first GLRI Action Plan, with a major focus on:

- cleaning up Great Lakes Areas of Concern;
- preventing and controlling invasive species;
- reducing nutrient runoff that contributes to algal blooms;
- restoring habitat to protect native species; and
- supporting Great Lakes resilience, education and science-based adaptive management (*i.e.*, how we make even better investment decisions over time).

While *Action Plan II* will continue to focus on key Great Lakes problems, it incorporates several fresh approaches:

- It expressly incorporates a science-based adaptive management framework that will be used to prioritize ecosystem problems to be targeted with GLRI resources, to select projects to address those problems and to assess the effectiveness of GLRI projects. Measures of Progress have been developed to track all actions implemented under *Action Plan II*.
- It commits agencies to develop and incorporate climate resiliency criteria in project selection processes. Agencies will develop standard criteria to ensure climate resiliency of Great Lakes Restoration Initiative-funded projects.
- It incorporates feedback for strengthening the GLRI that was contributed by the Great Lakes Advisory Board, the U.S.EPA Science Advisory Board, the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the Congressional Research Service, states, tribes, municipalities and the general

public through in-person meetings, webinars and conference calls. We will continue to improve implementation of the Initiative and have recently adopted new budgeting and planning processes that make it easier for federal agencies to work more closely with their state and tribal partners to ensure that appropriate projects are being prioritized and implemented.

Thank you Chairman Gibbs, Ranking Member Napolitano, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.