



Watermarks



Great Lakes Leadership
From Talk to Action

From Talk to Action: Great Lakes Leadership from the Ground Up

With tens of thousands of advocates speaking out, community partnerships addressing local water challenges, and fresh leadership on the most pressing Great Lakes issues — our region's commitment to clean water is clear. And the Alliance is ready to transform that commitment into tangible wins for the lakes.

Last year's elections touched every corner of the eight Great Lakes states. Seven of eight governorships, eight Senate seats, all members of the House, and hundreds of state and local offices were on the ballot. Many candidates included clean water issues in their platforms, responding to people all across the region who have spoken up about dirty water in our lakes and from our taps. Now, our elected leaders must both defend hard-fought clean water victories that are under assault, while advancing the new protections our communities need.

Our 2019 Federal Policy Agenda outlines the most important action items for Congress to protect the lakes. Read on in this issue of Watermarks for more about the policy priorities we're asking Congress to act on in the coming year.

In March, we joined 150 partner organizations in Washington, D.C. as part of Great Lakes Days with the Healing Our Waters Coalition. A top item on the agenda was urging Congress to support funding for Great Lakes restoration and infrastructure programs. Just a week after our trip, the White House released a budget gutting many of these critical programs for the third year running. But Congress holds the purse-strings. Backed by staunch support from across the region, we can override this move and ensure federal investment in the Great Lakes actually grows.

While Congress has an opportunity to lead on some Great Lakes issues, state action remains critical. Five of eight Great Lakes governors are new this year, and they will need to work proactively and work together for clean water. Governor Mike DeWine (OH) stares down the greatest pollution challenge Lake Erie has faced since the 1970s. His recently-released budget proposes new funding for Lake Erie cleanup and creates a chance to tie those dollars to measurable clean water performance. Governor J.B. Pritzker (IL) has signaled that he wants Illinois to lead in protecting the lakes from Asian carp. And Governor Gretchen Whitmer (MI), who ran on the most detailed and aggressive water platform in the region, is prioritizing clean water in her state's budget and policy agenda. In Wisconsin, Governor Tony Evers has declared 2019 the "Year of Clean Drinking Water."

When elected officials step up on these challenges and protect the health and safety of millions of people living around the Great Lakes, it's because of local action from people like you. For years, our advocates have spoken out on Great Lakes issues and propelled clean water wins forward. Right now, water is the talk of the region, and I look forward to converting that optimism to action with your support.



Joel Brammeier, President & CEO

Protecting the Great Lakes: 2019 Federal Policy Priorities

Every year, the Alliance for the Great Lakes releases its federal priorities, a platform of Great Lakes and clean water policies that serve as a foundation for our advocacy. We share our policy agenda with our supporters and members of Congress alike — inviting people around the region to share their stories and raise their voices, and carrying those stories with us to Washington, D.C.

While politics move fast, the hard work of building buy-in and securing lasting change often requires a long-term effort. So if you were to look at our federal priorities over the past few years, you'd see our core issues appear year after year, with updates and evolving advocacy asks. But from 2018 to 2019, there are some important distinctions.

The Vessel Incidental Discharge Act, a bill aimed at reducing aquatic invasive species introductions from ships' ballast water, does not appear in our 2019 Federal Policy Agenda. That's because last year, we won our years-long fight to limit the shipping industry's effort to roll back these critical protections. Now we're focusing our invasive species work on stopping Asian carp from reaching the Great Lakes.

We're also evolving our approach to water infrastructure. Our communities' water systems connect the health of the lakes, wildlife, and people. Those systems must effectively manage

wastewater and safely deliver drinking water. And the drinking water crisis in our region is without a doubt a Great Lakes issue. The lakes are the world's largest source of surface freshwater, and more than 40 million people rely on them for drinking water. It is vital that we ensure that Great Lakes water is safe, clean, and affordable for all who depend on it.

It continues to be critical to defend EPA and policies like the Clean Water Act from attempts by the White House to slash budgets and roll back rules. The good news is that we've beaten back these attacks in recent years. Our champions in Congress have consistently gone to bat for the lakes and won. With ongoing advocacy and outreach, the Alliance is confident that this year will be no exception.

Ensuring the Great Lakes are healthy and safe for all is an ambitious job. Together with people and partners from around the region, we have made progress. Addressing the clean water challenges ahead will require bold leadership. And we're ready.

Our complete 2019 Federal Policy Agenda, and details on how to take action, can be found at www.GreatLakes.org/2019Priorities.

Caring for the Lakes is a Family Affair

“Quite simply, there really is nothing more important than clean drinking water,”

said Joyce Solberg. Joyce and her husband Charles, along with their five children, Jenny, Chad, Travis, Lisa, and Sarah, see clean water as a guiding value for themselves and for the family business, Solberg Manufacturing.

“I believe in clean water. I love the lakes. And after raising five children, I finally had time to get involved with something I cared about,” she said. Joyce has been an active volunteer, serving on the Alliance’s Board of Directors for six years and the Great Blue Benefit committee, which plans the Alliance’s largest annual fundraiser.

For the Solbergs, caring for the lakes is personal, and supporting the Alliance has become a family affair. Jenny’s business, Rhine Hall Distillery, has supported the Alliance in numerous ways. Lisa, Sarah, and Travis Solberg have each contributed to the Alliance, and Chad Solberg served as a member of the Alliance’s

Young Professional Council in Chicago. Travis is also an Alliance Ambassador, an Adopt-a-Beach team leader, and recently joined the Alliance’s Climate Ride cycling team.

“Our family grew up swimming in Lake Michigan. We try to follow through on our support for the Alliance in any way that we can,” said Joyce.

Connecting the Alliance with their business is one way they’ve extended their love for the Great Lakes beyond individual support. Solberg Manufacturing is a certified B Corp.

“One of Solberg’s core principles is ‘We love our planet’. The environment has been a very important part of our giving as 50% of our total philanthropic giving is to the environment and an important part of that is local,” noted Joyce.

The Alliance for the Great Lakes would like to offer a special thanks to the Solberg family for sponsoring the Alliance’s 2019 Great Blue Benefit, our annual flagship event. Contact Development Coordinator Carolyn Rudinsky at crudinsky@greatlakes.org to learn more about how your business can support this year’s Great Blue Benefit in Chicago.

Left to right:
Travis, Charlie, Joyce,
Chad and Jenny
Solberg. Not pictured:
Sarah and Lisa Solberg.





Water Affordability:

Fixing What's Broken Without Hurting Those Who Can Least Afford It

We live on the shores of the world's largest freshwater system. More than 40 million people rely on the Great Lakes for drinking water, right in our backyard. Yet multiple reports have shown that a growing number of people around the Great Lakes cannot count on or afford clean, safe water in their homes. This is unacceptable.

First, water and sewer infrastructure in most Great Lakes communities is in desperate need of repair. And it is going to cost a lot to fix it. The price tag to repair and replace drinking and wastewater infrastructure in the eight Great Lakes states is estimated to be a staggering \$179 billion over 20 years. The consequence of inaction is dirty lakes, sewage backups in homes, and unhealthy drinking water for people.

Second, water stresses are not shared equally. People of color and low-income residents are disproportionately impacted. We know that this is not coincidental. When we talk about these water issues, we're really talking about an intersection of forces that result in black, brown, and low-income communities being most likely to struggle with water stress.

So the question becomes twofold: How do we make sure Great Lakes water is safe, clean, and affordable from the source to the tap? And

how do we ensure that the solutions we put forward equitably serve all Great Lakes communities? Answering both questions is critical to sustaining clean water solutions our region needs.

Some assistance programs to help individual ratepayers exist. But they are not enough, and they are often confusing and difficult to access. We need federal investment in State Revolving Funds to ensure communities can access low-interest loans to make needed infrastructure updates. And we need progressive funding models to ensure that the people least able to pay aren't forced to shoulder the cost of these vital upgrades.

This problem will not be solved overnight but there are steps elected officials can take now, as detailed in our 2019 Federal Policy Agenda.

How do we make sure Great Lakes water is safe, clean, and affordable from the source to the tap? And how do we ensure that the solutions we put forward equitably serve all Great Lakes communities?

Top 5 Priorities for Congress

Our 2019 Federal Policy Agenda lays out key action items for Congress to protect the Great Lakes. Here are our top five:



1 Prevent Asian carp from reaching the Great Lakes

Invasive Asian carp are creeping closer to Chicago and Lake Michigan. If these fish reach the lake, they would do irreparable harm to the Great Lakes ecosystem, and the multi-billion dollar fishing and recreation industries. The Army Corps of Engineers is finalizing a plan to stop them. Congress must fund this project.



2 Invest to improve the nation's wastewater infrastructure

The Great Lakes are home to more than 70% of America's combined sewers, which collect both sewage and stormwater runoff. During heavy rains combined sewers overflow, dumping raw or poorly-treated sewage into the lakes. Infrastructure updates are estimated at \$271 billion over the next 25 years. Congress should invest in the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and other infrastructure programs to help communities keep waterways safe and clean.

3 Ensure access to safe, clean, and affordable water

Crumbling pipes and failing drinking water infrastructure often causes unsafe drinking water and soaring bills. Our region's low-income communities and communities of color are bearing the brunt of the problem. Congress needs to increase funding to State Revolving Funds and prioritize water affordability in policy reforms so Great Lakes communities can access the water in their own backyards.



4 Reduce agricultural runoff and the harmful algal blooms it causes in the lakes

Algal blooms can turn toxic, harbor bacteria, and deplete oxygen in waterways causing "dead zones." Agricultural runoff is causing serious problems in western Lake Erie and around the lakes. Congress should support and fund the Clean Water Act and Farm Bill Conservation Programs to address this serious problem, and push back on White House efforts to roll back clean water rules.



5 Invest in restoration and strong agencies to protect the Great Lakes

Important restoration programs have been hugely successful for the lakes and local economies. In fact, a recent study found that every Great Lakes Restoration Initiative dollar spent from 2010 to 2016 will produce \$3.35 of additional economic activity through 2036. But these programs are under threat in the White House's new budget. Congress should fully fund and staff U.S. EPA and other agencies to carry out the important work of protecting clean water.



IN BRIEF

Want to be a plastic-free Great Lakes champion?

Check out our new resource, *Plastic-Free Great Lakes: An Advocacy Toolkit to Make a Difference In Your Community*. www.GreatLakes.org/Plastic-Free

We accomplished a lot together last year.

Read about our year-in-review our 2018 Annual Report at www.GreatLakes.org/2018AnnualReport

April was Earth Month, and **Aveda** salons all over the region gave back by fundraising to support the Alliance and other charities. Learn more online at www.GreatLakes.org/AvedaEarthMonth

KEY DATES

Great Blue Benefit

June 20th

Columbia Yacht Club
111 N. Lake Shore Dr., Chicago, IL

Clean Lake Benefit

September 19th

Great Lakes Brewing Company's Tasting Room
2701 Carroll Ave., Cleveland, OH

September Adopt-a-Beach

September 21st

Region Wide - Find an event online
www.GreatLakesAdopt.org

RECOGNIZING OUR SPONSORS

The Alliance for the Great Lakes' work to educate decision makers and stakeholders about policies and programs to protect the Great Lakes is supported by generous donors and funders including:

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TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

We'd love your feedback about our Watermarks newsletter. We're also happy to answer your questions about pressing Great Lakes issues. Email us at alliance@greatlakes.org



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Great Lakes photos by Lloyd DeGrane

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