Statement from the Wisconsin DNR Office of Great Waters regarding the announcement from President Biden and the U.S. EPA to invest $1 Billion from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to significantly accelerate cleanup and restoration of the Great Lakes

Feb. 18, 2022

The Biden Administration and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced on Feb. 17, 2022 that $1 billion from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will be used to significantly accelerate cleanup and restoration in the Great Lakes Areas of Concern.

This $1 billion investment is a game-changer for Great Lakes communities.

We at the Wisconsin DNR fully embrace this historic opportunity and we are working with our local, tribal, state and federal partners to complete the pollution cleanup and restoration in our Great Lakes Areas of Concern.

The U.S. and Canadian governments identified 43 heavily polluted sites on the Great Lakes in need of special attention in the 1980s, which they designated as Areas of Concern (or AOCs). To date, six sites have been removed from this list on the U.S. side.

The Biden Administration anticipates Infrastructure Investment and Job Act funding will clean up 22 additional sites by 2030— including Wisconsin’s four remaining AOCs. The AOCs on Lake Michigan are the Lower Green Bay and Fox River, Sheboygan River and the Milwaukee Estuary. On Lake Superior is the St. Louis River AOC, which Wisconsin shares with Minnesota. The Lower Menominee River, which forms the border with Michigan in northeast Wisconsin, was removed from the list of most polluted sites on the Great Lakes in 2020.

“Cleaning up these polluted hot spots is a priority across our state for both our public health and economic future,” said Wisconsin DNR Office of Great Waters Director Steve Galarneau. “We will continue to work closely with our Great Lakes communities and partners to ensure that Wisconsinites have access to clean water and that businesses can thrive in areas not threatened by pollution.”
“We are grateful to the EPA for their continued partnership on efforts to restore the Great Lakes,” added Galarneau. “We look forward to continuing this critical work in collaboration with our local, tribal, state and federal partners.”

**A healthy environment and economic prosperity go hand in hand.**

This new funding builds upon the highly successful Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). Since it was launched in 2010, federal funding totaling more the $525 million through the GLRI, has helped Wisconsin solve problems facing the Great Lakes. These projects have cleaned up toxic contamination, restored vital habitat for endangered species, prevented the spread of aquatic invasive species, restored wetlands, improved coastal resiliency and more. They also produce a substantial return on investment, with every dollar spent generating an estimated $3.35 in additional economic activity.

In 2018, an independent economic study from the Great Lakes Commission and the University of Michigan found that every GLRI dollar spent produces an additional $3.35 of economic activity. For older industrial cities, the study found that there may be more than $4 in additional economic activity for each federal dollar spent. A 2020 analysis of the Great Lakes determined that the region supports more than 1.3 million jobs, generating $82 billion in wages annually.

This new funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will allow for a major acceleration of progress that will deliver significant environmental, economic, health and recreational benefits for Wisconsin communities and throughout the Great Lakes region.

**Wisconsin’s Great Lakes Strategy: Solving Problems Facing the Great Lakes**

In addition to this new enhanced focus on Areas of Concern, Wisconsin also remains committed to addressing the many other challenges still facing the Great Lakes, including controlling harmful algal blooms, reducing nutrient pollution, preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species, and improving coastal resiliency.
These federal investments through the new Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and GLRI build upon state and local efforts to solve problems facing the Great Lakes. The Wisconsin Great Lakes Strategy—developed in partnership by the Wisconsin DNR, local communities, tribes, and citizen-led organizations—outlines clear actions needed to restore Wisconsin’s Great Lakes and their watersheds:

- Manage water use and water transfers out of the basin
- Clean up contaminated sites
- Eliminate persistent bio-accumulative toxins
- Control runoff pollution from nonpoint sources
- Restore vital habitat for native species and control invasive species
- Adopt sustainable practices to improve coastal resiliency
- Improve monitoring methods.