



Ohio Environmental Council

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[ UNLEASHING THE POWER OF GREEN ]

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## Ohioans send message to Congress on Great Lakes Day

Columbus, OH – Earlier this year, more than 100 Healing Our Waters – Great Lakes Coalition members, including more than 20 Ohioans, descended on Capital Hill in Washington, D.C., urging Ohio’s congressional members to help protect and restore Lake Erie.

The clean water advocates are calling on Congress to take the following actions:

1. Fully fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative at \$475 million – \$175 million more than what the President requested in his proposed 2011 budget. Sustained, consistent funding is needed to keep pace with urgent threats to the Great Lakes and make up for years of inadequate federal investment. Recently the USEPA requested proposals for projects totaling \$120 million. In reality, 1,050 proposals were submitted totaling more than \$943 million, of which 114 proposals came from Ohio totaling nearly \$82 million. From 2004 through 2010, federal funding flowing to the Great Lakes was below \$200,000. During President Obama’s campaign he promised the Great Lakes region a \$5 billion different vision - one that put people to work by funding solutions that address the most urgent problems facing the Lakes. According to the Brookings Institution, for every dollar invested in restoring the Great Lakes, \$2 - \$4 are returned. Congress needs to once again fully fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative at \$475 million to ensure the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative’s long-term success.
2. Support and pass the Great Lakes Ecosystem Protection Act (GLEPA) which is proposed to be introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senators George Voinovich and Carl Levin (D-MI) this week and in the U.S. House of Representatives by Representative Vern Ehlers (R-MI). The GLEPA would: (1) Provide a permanent source of funding for essential restoration programs such as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the Great Lakes Legacy Act; (2) Enhance regional coordination; (3) Increase accountability; and (4) ensure that the restoration efforts focus on the right priorities that produce the most benefit to the Lakes and the people, businesses, and communities that depend on them. It is time that the Great Lakes, which contain 20% of the world’s fresh surface water, are treated as the landmark that they are – rather than an earmark.

3. Slam the locks on Asian carp. Congress must direct the Administration to use every tool at its fingertips to keep the Asian carp out of the Great Lakes, including closing two Chicago locks. The cost for this is estimated at an additional investment of \$70 million a year, a small drop in Chicago's giant \$500 billion economy. Congress also must direct the US Army Corps of Engineers to outline a plan of action by 2011 to permanently separate the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds. Right now, Asian carp are poised to enter Lake Michigan through the Chicago Sanitary Ship Canal and devastate the recreational and economic value the Great Lakes provide Ohio. Asian carp are voracious feeders, requiring large amounts of plankton, making Lake Erie ideal habitat for Asian carp. Lake Erie, the shallowest and warmest of all the Great Lakes, is the most biologically productive Great Lake. It produces more fish for human consumption than all of the other lakes combined. Asian carp can dominate aquatic ecosystems by out-competing native fish--including perch, bass, and walleye -- for food and habitat. Because they feed near the base of the food chain, Asian carp can cause an entire system to become depauperate, or fall short of natural size and development. This is particularly concerning because Lake Erie is the walleye capital of the world and supports one of the biggest freshwater commercial fisheries in the world. In the Ohio waters of Lake Erie, about 35% of our perch quota is allocated to the commercial fishing industry. Each year more than \$801 million is generated for the State of Ohio due to recreational fishing in the Ohio Lake Erie basin. If Asian carp invade the Great Lakes, they could devastate this \$1 billion fishing industry and permanently alter how recreational boaters, anglers, wildlife watchers, and tourists use and enjoy Lake Erie and its many tributaries. As a result of tourism and travel from boaters, anglers, and wildlife watchers, Ohio gains \$10.75 billion in revenue annually and supports more than a quarter of a million jobs. The impact of the Asian carp would be irreversible to the people, wildlife, and economies that rely upon Lake Erie.

“Our region has worked collaboratively to put together its plans, roll up its sleeves, and get to work. Now is not the time to speed up, not slow down, the pace of that progress. Every day we wait the problems will only get worse and the solutions more costly,” said Kristy Meyer, OEC Director of Agricultural and Clean Water Programs.

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The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is Ohio's leading advocate for fresh air, clean water, and sustainable land use. The OEC has a 40-year history of innovation, pragmatism, and success. Using legislative initiatives, legal action, scientific principles, and statewide partnerships, the OEC secures a healthier environment for Ohio's families and communities. For more information, visit [www.theOEC.org](http://www.theOEC.org).