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# Biden–Harris Administration Announces More Than \$35 million to Selectees to Fund Environmental Justice Projects Across the Great Lakes

New EPA Great Lakes Environmental Justice Grant program is made possible by President Biden’s Investing in America Agenda

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**WASHINGTON** – Today, March 26, 2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the selection of four applicants to receive more than \$35 million to fund projects that advance environmental justice in underserved and overburdened communities across the Great Lakes. Through EPA’s newly created Great Lakes Environmental Justice Grant Program, made possible by President Biden’s Investing in America Agenda, each selectee will develop and oversee their own subgrant competition that will fund environmental protection and restoration projects that safeguard our nation’s largest fresh surface water resources and benefit underserved and overburdened communities throughout the Great Lakes Basin.

“Thanks to President Biden’s historic investments in America, we are taking another critical step to protect our treasured Great Lakes and advance environmental justice,” **said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan.** “Together, with the partners we’re announcing today, we will continue our work to remove barriers for communities that have been left behind while preserving the rich cultural, economic, and environmental role of the Great Lakes in communities across the Great Lakes Basin.”

The Great Lakes Environmental Justice Grant Program is part of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), the largest investment in the Great Lakes in two decades, which received \$1 billion in funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The following organizations have been selected to receive funding through today's announcement.

- **Restore America's Estuaries** was selected to receive \$19,999,976 to develop and implement a Great Lakes Environmental Justice Grant Program that, with the support of Great Lakes partners, will serve the entire Great Lakes Basin.
- **Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, Inc.** was selected to receive \$5,633,581 to develop and implement the Western New York Environmental Justice Grant Program for underserved communities in Lake Erie and Niagara River's watershed.
- **Ohio Lake Erie Commission** was selected to receive \$5,805,006 to develop and implement the Lake Erie Environmental Justice Grant Program for underserved communities in Ohio's Lake Erie watershed.
- **Southeast Michigan Council of Governments** was selected to receive \$4,200,000 to develop and implement the Advancing Environmental Quality of Life in Underserved Communities grant program for underserved communities in Southeast Michigan.

"There's no exaggerating the importance of protecting and restoring the Great Lakes. They provide our drinking water, fuel our economy, offer us spaces for recreation, and harbor vital resources for many Tribes," **said EPA Region 5 Administrator and Great Lakes National Program Manager Debra Shore.**

"Thanks to additional funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, EPA and our partners are making more progress than ever before and with today's announcement we are ensuring that some of our most vulnerable Great Lakes communities will benefit from these historic investments."

"Our Great Lakes make up 20% of the fresh water on Earth. It's why I have long fought for under resourced communities across our Great Lakes Region, especially in the Western Basin of Lake Erie, to receive the adequate resources they deserve to preserve our most precious resources. And, it's why I delivered funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the creation and funding of the Great Lakes Authority," **said Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (OH-09), Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development.** "I am thrilled to see more than \$5.8 million in funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law come back to Ohio as part of the EPA's Great Lakes Environmental Justice Grant Program to help underserved communities in the Lake Erie Watershed. This new initiative will ease administrative barriers and help underserved communities in our region more effectively access federal funding for important local projects."

"The climate crisis is having a real impact on our everyday lives, and we know that historically underserved communities are disproportionately hurt," **said Congresswoman Debbie Dingell (MI-06).** "As a co-chair of the Great Lakes Task force, I have seen just how critically important The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is to protecting our greatest natural treasures and the communities that depend on them. These grant programs will prioritize those who have been overlooked for too long, and I will continue to work in Congress and with the Biden Administration to ensure we're focused on environmental justice as we make historic investments in combating the climate crisis."

"Restore America's Estuaries is looking forward to working with the Great Lakes National Program Office on the Great Lakes Environmental Justice Grant Program," **said Daniel Hayden, President and CEO of**

**Restore America's Estuaries (RAE).** "RAE is excited to create a grant program and training programs for the Great Lakes Region and to partner with organizations committed to protecting our waterways. These funds will be utilized in the region's underserved communities with the aim of ensuring cleaner waterways suitable for both recreational and commercial purposes."

"Investment in Southeast Michigan's green infrastructure network is critical for the health and well-being of our region, and this is especially true for communities which have been historically underserved," **said Amy O'Leary, Executive Director of SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.** "SEMCOG is thrilled to receive this funding from the Great Lakes National Program Office and looks forward to working with environmental justice communities on managing stormwater runoff and improving water quality."

"The Ohio Lake Erie Commission is very excited to partner with the Black Environmental Leaders and Rural Action to bring more Great Lakes restoration projects to historically overburdened and underserved communities in Ohio's Lake Erie watershed," **said Ohio Lake Erie Commission Executive Director, Joy Mulinex.** "This work will enhance Ohio's efforts to protect and restore Lake Erie in communities that have not had the capacity to undertake this work."

"Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper has spent decades mobilizing our community and advocating for our local environment in order to correct mistakes and clean up after generations of poor decisions," **said Jill Jedlicka, Executive Director.** "Western New York is home to numerous underserved communities who are faced with a disproportionate burden of environmental stressors and injustices, and it is the primary goal of this project to empower local communities and increase their capacity to implement solutions. With USEPA's support, Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper's leadership team and our partners will have the combined skills, shared vision, and community relationships to help break down barriers, address these ongoing challenges, and bring an innovative watershed funding partnership model to the lower Great Lakes. We are grateful for the trust and investment by USEPA-GLNPO that will allow us to dedicate federal dollars towards local projects in the communities that need it the most, while simultaneously creating a model for sustainable funding and collaboration into the future."

Many communities in the Great Lakes Basin lack the resources needed to apply for, obtain, and oversee the implementation of federal grant projects. These new grant programs will ease these administrative barriers and help underserved communities more effectively access federal funding for important local projects. EPA anticipates finalizing all the awards once all legal and administrative requirements are satisfied. Funding opportunities are expected to be made available to communities within the first year of selectees receiving the funds announced today.

Cities, states, Tribes and nonprofit organizations representing underserved communities will be able to apply directly to the selected Grant programs to fund a range of environmental protection and restoration projects in underserved communities that will further the goals of the GLRI. These programs will also provide technical assistance to organizations in underserved communities to increase their organizational capacity. This investment will also encourage even greater environmental, economic, health, and recreational benefits for underserved Great Lakes communities.

EPA's Great Lakes Environmental Justice Grant Program was created under President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which invests \$1 billion in the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to accelerate

Great Lakes restoration and protection. The program also delivers on the Biden-Harris Administration's [Justice40 Initiative](#) [↗](#) which set the goal that 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.

## Additional Background

Since 2010, EPA's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) has funded more than 7,500 restoration and protection projects totaling more than \$3.7 billion. Read more about the [Great Lakes Restoration Initiative](#).

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