

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

## *Cosponsor the Great Lakes Ecosystem Protection Act*

September 11, 2012

Dear Senator:

As co-chairs of the Senate Great Lakes Task Force, we will soon introduce legislation to authorize and reauthorize key programs to protect the Great Lakes, the world's largest system of fresh surface water and the source of drinking water for 40 million people. The Great Lakes are one of our most precious natural resources, which provide immense ecological and economic benefits. The Great Lakes are home to more than 3,500 species of plants and animals system-wide and support a \$7 billion fishery and an estimated 1.5 million American jobs.

In 2010, Senators Levin (D-MI) and Voinovich (R-OH) were joined by many Senate colleagues to introduce The Great Lakes Ecosystem Protection Act (GLEPA). Specifically, this bipartisan, bicameral legislation would formally authorize the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), an inter-agency program designed to address the most significant problems in the Great Lakes ecosystem, with a focus on tangible, measurable results. The bill would also reauthorize two other existing programs: (1) the Great Lakes Legacy program, which supports the removal of contaminated sediments at more than thirty Areas of Concern (AOCs) across the Great Lakes, and (2) the Great Lakes National Program Office, which handles Great Lakes matters for the EPA. The bill would formally establish an interagency task force, as well as an advisory board to ensure that federal programs are coordinated efficiently, reflect input from a variety of stakeholders, and ensure that taxpayer funds are effectively directed to worthwhile restoration projects, which produce tangible, measureable results.

The Great Lakes face serious challenges to the ecological and economic well-being of the entire Basin. Legislation is needed to ensure the continued protection of the Great Lakes from the threat of invasive species such as Asian carp, sewer overflows and runoff that can harm aquatic and public health, and contaminated sediments. Furthermore, as the U.S. and Canada work to uphold the obligations of the updated binational Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, it is important that this Congress demonstrates a shared commitment to protecting this precious natural resource with strong legislation such as GLEPA.

We plan to introduce the bill before Congress recesses. We will shortly be circulating draft text of the legislation that closely mirrors GLEPA from the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress (S. 3073). If you would like to co-sponsor this important legislation or would like to share your input on the bill, please contact either one of us, or have your staff contact Alice Yates in Senator Levin's office at [alice\\_yates@levin.senate.gov](mailto:alice_yates@levin.senate.gov) or Sarah Walter in Senator Kirk's office at [sarah\\_walters@kirk.senate.gov](mailto:sarah_walters@kirk.senate.gov).

Sincerely,



Mark Kirk



Carl Levin