

FRESHWATER VOICES



2024 ISSUE 3

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Jill Ryan
Executive Director

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

GAINING MOMENTUM ON GREAT LAKES REGION ISSUES

The Great Lakes region stretches across two countries, eight U.S. states, and two Canadian provinces, encompassing vast urban centers and thousands of rural communities alongside an immense biodiverse and interconnected ecosystem.

Our region's vast scale and complexity present significant challenges in tackling serious threats to our waterways, groundwater, and drinking water such as:

- Invasive species
- Mining
- Legacy pollution
- Climate change
- Polluted runoff from industrial and agricultural activities
- Drinking and waste water infrastructure is aging and failing

Freshwater Future, together with our partners, have worked on these challenges for decades, advocating for communities and leading initiatives to protect and restore lakes, rivers, wet-lands, and the Great Lakes. Given the sheer scale of these issues, change doesn't come overnight. But thanks to persistent efforts, we're seeing momentum build.

Important steps forward included:

- Much-needed updates to federal policy regulating lead in drinking water were finalized improving the safety of drinking water (page 2).
- The ability of a state agency to issue permits on how factory farms manage manure was upheld by a state supreme court that will help to reduce nutrient pollution that cause toxic algal blooms (page 3).

- After 15 years, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which Freshwater Future helped coordinate and lead, has been instrumental in boosting cleanup and protection efforts in the U.S. totaling over \$5 billion (page 4).
- Earlier this year, the Brandon Road Dam project moved forward, a key step to preventing invasive carp species from establishing in the Great Lakes.

Long-term, focused action on critical issues has prepared us to take on emerging threats like the Energy Permitting Reform Act (page 5).

The momentum and the progress wouldn't be possible without you! Over the past year alone, thousands of supporters signed petitions and submitted comments, demonstrating a powerful public demand for policy changes and freshwater protection. Every day, I'm inspired by those who step up to take action to protect our shared waters.

While we highlight the progress of our efforts, it's truly the commitment of people like you that drives real change. Whether you're working to promote clean energy, protect wetlands, eliminate toxic substances, or ensure clean drinking water for your community, your dedication fuels progress.

Looking ahead, Freshwater Future is committed to working on these big challenges with you to create a healthier, more resilient Great Lakes Region for generations to come.

LEAD AND COPPER RULE IMPROVEMENTS MOVE FORWARD

Freshwater Future worked with our grassroots partners to create and implement policy change at the national level. When the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced plans to update the federal rule regulating lead in drinking water - we sprung into action. Nearly 3,000 of our supporters took action to demand the strongest lead protections possible.

Ultimately, our combined advocacy along with partners won a major step towards a lead-free future. The final Lead and Copper Rule Improvements, released in October, created the first national mandate to replace lead service lines in 10 years, lowered the action level of “elevated” lead in drinking water, and created new public education requirements.

In our comments, we demanded the removal of time extensions for lead line replacement for large systems like Chicago. The EPA heard our call, and reduced these extension times. Moving forward, we are committed to working with our partners to ensure lead pipes are replaced as quickly, equitably, and safely as possible – because our children and our communities can’t wait for clean water.



FLINT LAB RECEIVES CERTIFICATION

The McKenzie Patrice Croom Flint Community Lab recently achieved a huge milestone, receiving State of Michigan accreditation for testing six heavy metals in drinking water, including lead. Certification means that the Flint Lab underwent an extensive review of its facility, methods, and quality control. Opened in 2020, the Flint Lab provides Flint residents with free water testing, ensuring residents have access to reliable information about the safety of their drinking water.

The Flint Lab is the first of its kind, a community-built and community-run lab that works with local high school and college students to collect and analyze samples. This innovative approach and collaborative community involvement has received national recognition including the U.S. Water Prize.

NO LEAD IS SAFE CAMPAIGN HELPS COMMUNITIES STAY SAFE FROM LEAD

Before the Flint Water Crisis in 2014, most people were unconcerned about lead in their drinking water. Now we know that lead service lines are a leading cause of elevated lead levels in drinking water across the U.S. Four out of the top five U.S. cities with the most lead water pipes are in the Great Lakes region: Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and Milwaukee.

This is why Freshwater Future started our **No Lead is Safe Campaign** featuring helpful information with shareable education materials to provide trusted resources to residents and community groups about how to stay safe from lead. Thanks to this toolkit, thousands of community members are now aware of lead poisoning dangers and families are getting the help and information they need.

The Freshwater Future campaign also delivers real-time social media alerts to people in communities with elevated lead levels and other water quality issues in their water systems, ensuring they are informed about the issue and equipped with essential guidance and information to safeguard their families. This year alone we’ve informed over 50,000 people! We enable individuals to not only access critical information but also actively engage by asking questions and sharing this vital knowledge with their extended networks.



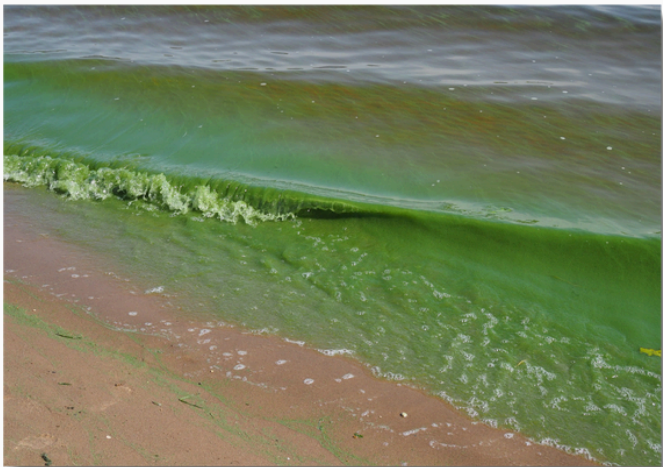
NOT A FLINT RESIDENT - BUT WANT TO HAVE YOUR WATER TESTED?

Superior Coffee Roasting Co. in collaboration with Freshwater Future and the Flint Community Lab, are offering a lead water testing kit for \$40 with the bonus of receiving a complimentary bag of coffee. Now is the perfect time to check your home’s tap water for lead. The kit also makes a great gift!

To purchase, visit www.superiorcoffee.com or scan this QR code.



ADDRESSING THE LINK BETWEEN FACTORY FARMS AND HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS



This summer, harmful algal blooms (HABs) continued to worsen and spread throughout the Great Lakes region. While Lake Erie remains a hotspot for toxic cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) blooms, other water bodies in the region including Green Bay in Wisconsin, Saginaw Bay and Muskegon Lake in Michigan, and some areas of New York's Finger Lakes are seeing more HABs emerge.

While climate change and warmer water temperatures create favorable conditions for harmful algal blooms (HABs), manure and nutrient pollution from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) are also major contributors to the increase in HABs.

The Great Lakes and Michigan's water resources gained an important win this summer, thanks to a recent decision of the Michigan Supreme Court. The court ruled Michigan Department of Environment Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) has the authority to impose stringent conditions on Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) through the permitting process. Freshwater Future, and other environmental groups, acted as intervenors in the legal battle, supporting stronger regulatory measures.

Leading the charge for stronger CAFO laws to protect Lake Erie, Sandy Bihn of Lake Erie Water Keepers, with support from Freshwater Future, held the annual Great Lakes HABs, CAFO, and Manure Conference in Toledo. The two-day conference included a drive-by tour of industrial farms in the Indiana-Ohio area curated by neighbors living near these facilities, a boat tour on the Maumee River from downtown Toledo to the drinking water intake, and a day filled with eye-opening presentations and impact stories from economists, researchers, lawyers, local community advocates, and small farm owners.

Panelists urged holding corporate polluters accountable for their role in nutrient run-off. Researchers and economists provided studies that affirm current approaches to reducing runoff from CAFOs are insufficient and have not brought us closer to the 2025 goal of a 40% reduction in phosphorus and nutrient levels. It has become clear that federal and state agencies must shift from voluntary efforts to mandatory regulations in controlling manure applications at CAFOs and large-scale farms to better manage nutrient pollution at the source.

The compelling research and community stories from the conference has since led to investigative reports into these CAFO and large-scale farms from both local and state media outlets. The Ohio Department of Agriculture was also recently reported for multiple permit violations by the Ohio EPA. While the fight to reduce nutrient pollution is far from over, this year we witnessed significant strides in local advocacy efforts.

Freshwater Future in partnership with Lake Erie Waterkeeper hosted the Great Lakes CAFO + HABs Conference in Toledo, Ohio in May. Experts and advocates networked and discussed how to combat CAFO and HABs threats.



#WE ARE LAKE ERIE



In August, Freshwater Future and Freshwater Future Canada launched #WeAreLakeErie, a social media campaign celebrating why we love and should continue to invest in the well-being of Lake Erie.

Thanks to everyone who posted photos, stories and experiences using the hashtag #WeAreLakeErie, Freshwater Future was able to reach over 15,000 users and received nearly 600 reactions to our posts. We're already planning next year's social media event to share more of your Lake Erie experiences. Stay tuned for details!

Bald Eagle nest at Lakeview Park in Lorain, Ohio shared by Brad Charles Melzer.



Lake Erie sunset in Dunkirk, NY shared by Lynda Serafin Marquardt.

15 YEARS OF GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE: PROGRESS AND CRITICAL NEEDS

Fifteen years ago, Freshwater Future, as part of the Healing Our Waters (HOW) Coalition leadership, successfully advocated for the U.S. Congress to pass billions in funding to restore the health of the Great Lakes by establishing the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Untreated sewage, toxic hot spots with legacy industrial pollution, and invasive species were degrading our precious Great Lakes. These threats and others put the Great Lakes, which comprise nearly 20% of the world's fresh surface water, and the source of drinking water for 42 million people in Canada and the United States at risk.

Thankfully, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative's investment of over \$4.9 billion has moved the Great Lakes away from a dangerous tipping point of degradation.

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative's Funding has supported critical projects such as:

- Upgrading the Detroit wastewater treatment plant to reduce nutrient pollution
- Cleaning up the most toxic locations (including removing 7 from the most toxic list!)
- Preventing flooding and improving wildlife habitat by restoring at least 65,000 acres of coastal wetlands

MOVING FORWARD

We've come a long way, but much more work must be done. Twenty-five toxic hot spots have yet to be removed from the most toxic status, impacting both the environment and the health of local communities. Ensuring that residents living near the Great Lakes have access to clean water and recreation opportunities remains a critical goal. Phosphorus pollution from agriculture continues to feed harmful algal blooms. Weakened regulations make our remaining wetlands vulnerable to permanent destruction.

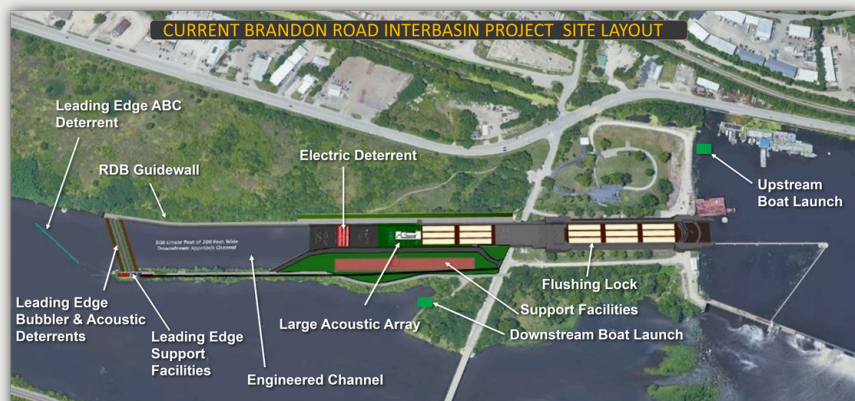
Restoring the health of ecosystems requires persistence and tenacity. There are no easy fixes or simple solutions. But with continued funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the engagement of community groups around the Great Lakes region, we are confident that we can keep progressing toward healthier waters.



A successful wetland habitat restoration was completed in 2020 on the lower Muskegon River in Michigan. More than 53 acres of emergent wetland were restored.

UPDATE ON INVASIVE CARP WIN! BRANDON ROAD LOCK AND DAM PROJECT

Funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has been crucial for preventing the establishment of invasive carp species—silver, big head, and black. This year, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers started constructing additional fortifications to the Brandon Road Lock and Dam on the Des Plaines River near Joliet, Illinois. Freshwater Future and our supporters have been advocating for effective solutions and keeping politicians accountable on this issue since 2010.



Project Update: In July 2024, Illinois and Michigan signed a partnership agreement with the United States Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) Rock Island District, moving the project into construction phase. This agreement allowed \$274 million in federal funding, including \$226 million provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and \$114 million in state funding to be used for construction of the first of three construction increments of the \$1.15 billion project.

Photo Credit: USACE

PROPOSED U.S. LAW THREATENS GREAT LAKES WATER QUALITY

A dangerous piece of legislation, the Energy Permitting Reform Act of 2024 (EPRA) will put waters in the Great Lakes at risk by upending permit processes and timelines. This harmful bill is a game changer. Freshwater Future is pulling back the curtain on this bill to reveal how it ignores water protection and prioritizes mining and fossil fuel interests over community safety.

If adopted, it would weaken critical environmental protections, open up vast areas of public lands to mining waste storage and offshore waters to more oil and gas drilling, and diminish the ability of impacted communities to challenge harmful projects.

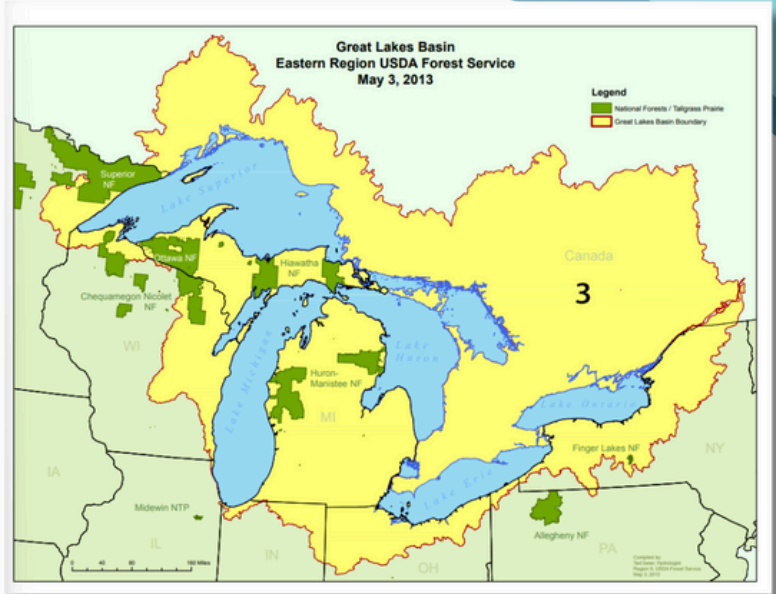
Mining Waste on Federal Lands and Acid Mine Drainage

Our partners like WaterLegacy, Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition, Front Forty, Coalition to SAVE the Menominee, Citizens for a Safe & Clean Lake Superior, and Protect the Porkies are fighting for the clean water and health of their communities in the northern Great Lakes region by resisting increased pressure from the mining industry - and winning (*See our 2024 Issue 2 newsletter for more details*).

Yet, EPRA threatens to allow mining waste - and thus acid mine drainage that pollutes freshwater and harms aquatic life - on public lands. EPRA would allow mining companies to claim public land for toxic waste, tailings, and other mining operations, increasing environmental hazards in surrounding communities and endangering our waters.

Fossil Fuel Projects on Public Lands and Pipelines

The bill fast-tracks fossil fuel projects on public lands, including those near the Great Lakes where risks to water quality and ecosystem biodiversity are high. This bill prioritizes oil and gas projects and puts one of the world's largest freshwater sources at risk.



Green areas show some of the federal lands in the Great Lakes basin that would be vulnerable to mining waste storage and oil and gas development from the proposed legislation.

ERPA applies to a wide range of energy projects, including the construction, development, production, storage, and transportation of energy. This includes oil pipelines, such as Line 5, a 71 year old pipeline running under the lakes that could cause a catastrophic oil spill.

The permitting reform bill contains significant limitations to judicial review and accelerates the permitting process, which could significantly reduce the ability of the public, community groups, and state authorities to challenge Line 5's reroutes and operation.

Community Input and Transparency

The bill reduces the time for environmental reviews from six years to just 150 days under the National Environmental Policy Act. Inadequate evaluations of harmful energy projects, mainly oil and gas drilling, can lead to project approvals without fully considering the impacts on water quality, ecosystems, or the health of the environment. Historically, this process has also been critical for allowing the communities most impacted by these projects to provide input and address their concerns.



WHAT YOU CAN DO!

You can take action on this issue by emailing or calling your senator to say NO to this bill. We've made it easy for you with our online petition and talking points.



Scan the QR Code to take action now!

THANK YOU to All of Our Donors July 1-October 31, 2024

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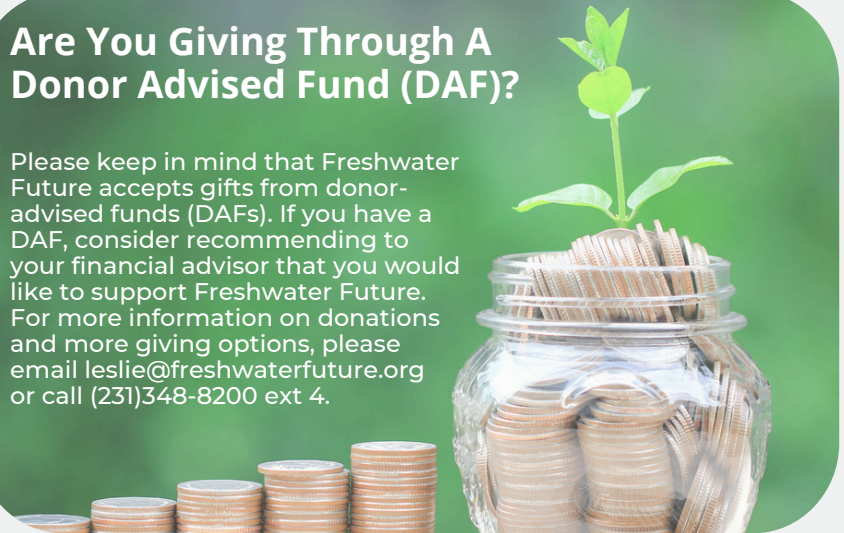
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Freshwater Future's Walk, Paddle,
and Roll Campaign. We raised over
\$2,000 for the Great Lakes Region!

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Please keep in mind that Freshwater Future accepts gifts from donor-advised funds (DAFs). If you have a DAF, consider recommending to your financial advisor that you would like to support Freshwater Future. For more information on donations and more giving options, please email leslie@freshwaterfuture.org or call (231)348-8200 ext 4.



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STAFF

- ALANA HONAKER**
Grants & Community Program Associate
alana@freshwaterfuture.org
- ALEXIS SMITH**
Program Co-Director
alexis@freshwaterfuture.org
- ANN BAUGHMAN**
Associate Director
ann@freshwaterfuture.org
- ANNA BUNTING**
Program Co-Director
anna@freshwaterfuture.org
- HILLARD HAMPTON**
Associate Director for Urban Partnerships
hillard@freshwaterfuture.org
- JILL RYAN**
Executive Director
jill@freshwaterfuture.org
- JOSH HEUPEL**
Policy Program Intern
josh@freshwaterfuture.org
- KRISTEN HAITAIAN**
Program Co-Director
kristen@freshwaterfuture.org
- KWAME HAMPTON**
Community Program Coordinator
kwame@freshwaterfuture.org
- LAURIE BREIGHNER**
Grants and Administrative Specialist
laurie@freshwaterfuture.org
- LESLIE BURK**
Communications & Development Director
leslie@freshwaterfuture.org
- LISA ROSS**
Database Manager
lisa@freshwaterfuture.org
- STEPHANIE ALTROCK**
Accounting Director
stephanie@freshwaterfuture.org

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FRESHWATER FUTURE & PARTNERS
Protecting Our Waters Together



West Grand Boulevard Collaborative and 4 Lotz of Reasonz helped Freshwater Future staff members give a tour to Kresge Foundation grantees to learn about community driven solutions to flooding in Detroit. (From left, Kwame Hampton, Cassandra Floyd, Donna McDuffie, and Ann Baughman).



Great weather and amazing artists, volunteers, and festival attendees helped make this year's 6th annual Water is Life Festival in Petoskey, MI a huge success. (Top Photo - Festival Director, Jannan Cornstalk; Bottom Photo - Freshwater Future staff Laurie Breighner and Ann Baughman)



Freshwater Future Executive Director, Jill Ryan (L), and WEL Coalition Campaign Director, Kristy Meyer (R), joined attendees of the Forest to MI Faucet Conference for an insightful tour led by Marty Flynn, Water/Wastewater Supervisor for the City of Petoskey, MI. The tour highlighted Petoskey's wellheads, water tower, and wastewater treatment plant.



Anna Bunting, Freshwater Future Staff and Abi Buddington, Committee to Preserve the Finger Lakes tour the Greenidge Generation bitcoin mine area in Dresden, NY. Our partners at Committee to Preserve the Finger Lakes and Seneca Lake Gaurdian are fighting to keep Seneca Lake cool and free of harmful algal blooms.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS!



Maggie Fritz
U.S. Board

Maggie Fritz lives in Baltimore and serves as the Maryland Director of Major Giving at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation managing a portfolio of individuals, corporate partners, and foundations making significant philanthropic gifts that transform the health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

Her environmentalism was shaped by annual visits to her family's home-away-from-home on the Straits of Mackinac, and by growing up in California's devastating drought of the mid-2010s. Maggie's lifelong connection to water (and firsthand experience with inadequate access to water) is a driving force in her passion for this work.



Barbara King
Canadian Board

Barbara King resides in Eastern Ontario and brings over 25 years in nonprofit leadership and management and involvement in freshwater issues. Barbara was the Executive Director at Watersheds Canada until 2022 and currently is a mentor and coach at the Capacity Building Institute working with the next generation of leaders in the environmental nonprofit sector.

Barbara holds a Master's degree in Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership from Carleton University in addition to an ecosystem management diploma from Sir Sandford Fleming College.

Freshwater Future would also like to express our deepest thanks and gratitude to outgoing board member KELSEY SCARFONE for her many years of service and dedication. You will be missed!

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Consider making a donation in honor of family and friends to Freshwater Future this holiday season. The recipient gets to be a part of helping more people and communities in the Great Lakes Region access clean and safe water. Freshwater Future will also send a greeting card acknowledging your gift.

To make an online donation, SCAN the QR Code or please visit freshwaterfuture.org and click "DONATE". To mail your donation to: Freshwater Future, PO Box 2479, Petoskey, MI 49770. THANK YOU!

