



# Priorities for Ensuring Access to Safe, Affordable, And Reliable Drinking Water in the Great Lakes Region and the Country

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Recommendations from Great Lakes Community Advocates — March 9th, 2023

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## **Protect water from privatization**

*From Sterling, New York to Mecosta, Michigan, private companies are jeopardizing public source waters as they pump water for profit in the Great Lakes region. Privatization and commodification of water in all forms creates water scarcity and unaffordability for the public. While Congress partners with state governments to hold surface waters of the Great Lakes in public trust, their connected ground waters lack similar affirmative protections. The long-term health of water in the Great Lakes region is threatened by corporate extraction and consumption and needs protection as the largest source of fresh surface water in the country.*

**Recommendations:** Support the human right to water. Develop protections of all waters in the Great Lakes from the threat of privatization and commodification. Maintain the Great Lakes Compact while supporting stronger state-level water protection regimes.

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## **Create a pathway for long-term water affordability**

*The share of federal funding to water utilities has dropped from over 60% in the 1970's to under 10% now. Despite an EPA water bill affordability standard of 4.5% of monthly household income, a fifth of low-income residents pay disproportionately more - over 12% - of their disposable income. Programs like the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) are important tools for achieving long term affordability so that residents can break away from the violent cycle of water debt and disconnections.*

**Recommendations:** Incorporate water affordability measures into any infrastructure package, such as funding grants instead of loans for disadvantaged communities and incentives for utilities to adopt more equitable water and sewer rate structures; renew LIHWAP as a long-term program as it expires at the end of 2023; incentivize income-based long-term affordability programs<sup>1</sup>; and ban water shut offs to protect public health and the basic right to water.

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<sup>1</sup>[Moonshot Mission, Water Affordability Analyses for Six Michigan Communities, 2022](https://tinyurl.com/29vf9k74) (https://tinyurl.com/29vf9k74)

## **Invest in drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater infrastructure**

*Aging drinking water infrastructure threatens our region's future prosperity and the health of our citizens. Leaking pipes lead to significant waste, in some cases as much as 50% of a system's treated water. Aging, outdated, and over-burdened combined sewer systems release sewage and stormwater into the Great Lakes each year, closing beaches and spreading contaminants and pathogens that pose a substantial threat to public health. Disadvantaged communities face significant barriers to accessing water infrastructure funding and rely on unaffordable rate increases.*

**Recommendations:** Boost funding for the State Revolving Fund programs and increase subsidized funding for disadvantaged communities; ensure that infrastructure funding requires, incentivizes, and/or supports nature-based solutions that enhance climate resilience; encourage more green infrastructure; promote policies and incentives that increase access to water infrastructure financing and ensure affordable water to all residents; and, when funding local projects, provide training, employment, contracting and other economic opportunities to low-income community residents.

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## **Protect the nation's largest freshwater source from the transportation of fossil fuels and petrochemicals**

*The Great Lakes, which hold 21% of the world's fresh surface water, are the source of drinking water for more than 40 million residents. Yet, it is under constant threat of contamination from the transportation of fossil fuels and petrochemicals. The recent train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio has released harmful petrochemicals that killed thousands of fish in nearby streams and threatened the drinking water of millions. Relatedly, in 2010, an Enbridge pipeline ruptured near the Kalamazoo River, releasing an excess of 1 million gallons of thick tar sand oil, causing a do not drink tap water advisory and forcing people out of their homes. Today, Enbridge's Line 5 continues to be in operation 20 years past its lifespan and threatens water quality and lifeways of the entire Great Lakes basin.*

**Recommendations:** Codify pre-2017 protections, including train brake technology requirements. Support the immediate retirement of Enbridge Line 5 which is 20 years past its intended lifetime.

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## **Further Great Lakes Recommendations**

- **Fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative** at the full \$425 million.
- **Address causes of Harmful Algal Blooms** - particularly manure and nutrient management of large agricultural operations through funds for monitoring and enforcement of the Clean Water Act.