

Great Lakes Basin Restoration Project Prioritization and Project Selection

Sub-Committee Recommendations for Charge Question 3

Due date: July 23rd GLAB Meeting

Charge Question 3:

How should the next Action Plan provide better guidance on the selection and prioritization process for restoration projects outside of AOCs?

This is a broad question that potentially addresses multiple aspects of Action Plan prioritization, including toxics at locations outside of AOCs, work under the other four focal areas, and the ultimate influence of all GLRI projects across the basin.

DRAFT Recommendations

- We propose that EPA develop specific mechanisms to take into account the cumulative effects of multiple projects at a spatial scale larger than most individual projects. The appropriate scale may be each Great Lake, although more regional as well as basin-wide evaluation may also be appropriate. LAMPs may be an appropriate mechanism, although it needs to be determined whether existing LAMPs are sufficiently up-to-date and focused to guide prioritization.
- LAMPs and other collaborative processes have valuable history and knowledge. A process to re-energize LAMPs, drawing on multiple partners (state and local governments, NGOs), may be needed; and the increasing availability of large data sets and spatial mapping tools can aid the development of more holistic approaches. Knowledge by partners that the LAMPs will be used to prioritize restoration activities and influence project selections will assure strong participation and support for these action plans.
- We recommend that the states and key partners have a project review and comment role in future GLRI project selections. The states are largely the Great Lakes projects implementers working closer with partners. They work closely with local partners who are oftentimes the lead on projects and the states are a nexus to basin-wide and regional perspectives. We propose the states and other partners are solicited for review, comments and rankings for all GLRI projects relative to their perspective state or region to assist the Federal government in their project selection. Under this approach, the states and other partners are not at the final project selection table but would be able to provide some of that critical context for projects - sometimes alerting the review team of some of the other issues around a project. That additional context sometimes

is a cautionary note, but often is a stronger endorsement as state agencies and other partners can explain how this project fits into the bigger picture that those with state GLRI implementation roles are often aware.

- We recommend continued efforts to improve communication and collaboration between states, tribes, and partners and the federal agencies charged with carrying out the GLRI. The communication and collaboration should happen on priority setting, federal work, implementing programs, and grants. Greater transparency will lead to stronger support for the GLRI work and will help avoid delays in those instances where projects are not “permissible” or have other complications.
- We recommend these recommendations guide EPA in its interactions with the Inter-Agency Task Force. In the past, a significant fraction of the GLRI dollars and responsibility for important focal areas were passed to other agencies (e.g. most habitat dollars for 2011 and 2012 were administered through the USFWS). We believe that these recommendations are important guidance for the prioritization of future projects under the GLRI, regardless of which agency has final responsibility.