

Habitats and Species

Understanding that the intent was to make the GLRI Action Plan II more streamlined and focused, the fact that the draft is not particularly detailed makes it hard to provide a thorough evaluation. That being said, the Habitats and Species focus area of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative's Action Plan II has some good features. Namely, we would like to commend the Action Plan's explicit incorporation of priorities developed by regional conservation strategies and the Great Lakes Habitat Biodiversity Conservation Strategies. A lot of work has already been put into developing these strategies and priorities. By coordinating, the Action Plan II is ensuring the hard work will not be wasted, and that there will be no duplication of efforts. It is also essential for broad scale coordination to better understand the implication of proposed habitat protection and restoration projects, and the projects' larger-scale and long-term efficacy.

The inclusion of annual evaluations are a positive addition to the Action Plan, driving the ability to implement a policy of adaptive management.

It is also good that climate change is specifically referenced as a possible stressor to habitats and species. Climate change has been identified in some of the Lakes and Lakes' ecosystems as one of the top stressors to biodiversity, and it is important that the Action Plan references that reality. However, we recommend that the Action Plan show more of a link between the threat of climate change and the need to address habitats and species. It should be specifically mentioned that building resiliency is a key issue for adapting to the effects of climate change.

In addition to these, other comments and questions specific to the Habitats and Species section are listed below:

Species

1. With the specific mention of habitat assessment and evaluation activities on page 21, it is important to include species assessment and evaluation activities. Unless an evaluation of which threatened or endangered species exist in given areas, it would be much harder to prioritize habitat protection and restoration activities.
2. The Measures of Progress for the species portion are weak. By using the number of projects funded by the GLRI for species work as the measure, no qualitative information is being analyzed and the efficacy of the projects in protecting or restoring habitat is not being assessed. The measures of progress within each focus area should better reflect how projects within this area are reaching the goals for improving the health of the ecosystem. This specific measure of progress could include such evaluations as whether the project is increasing native populations, reducing the threat of invasive species to native species, increasing viability. At the very least, several of the bullets listed on page 23 could be used as measures of progress that would include the baselines from work performed within the first 5 years of the GLRI, such as the protection and restoration of species diversity, the reintroduction of populations of native species to restored habitats, and the management of invasive species that inhibit the sustainability of native species.
3. There is some question about what the "GLRI-targeted species" are, and how these species become targeted.

Habitat

1. The phrase, “protect, restore and enhance” risks losing the importance and nuance of each type of the three actions. Each type of action is important, but each is different. By lumping them together, one or two might get lost in the implementation of the GLRI.
2. It is important for the Action Plan to contain more of an emphasis on the permanency of GLRI-funded activities than currently included in the draft. If all of the restoration and enhancement to habitats are done in areas that do not have long-term management plans in place, then the work can be undone.
3. There is some question about the measures of progress for habitat activities. For the second Measures of Progress with Annual Targets, measuring the number of miles of Great Lakes shoreline and riparian corridors protected, restored and enhanced by GLRI-funded projects, what is the reasoning behind the fluctuation in targeted miles from year to year?