



THE NORTHEAST-MIDWEST SENATE COALITION

GREAT LAKES TASK FORCE

March 14, 2008

The Honorable Herb Kohl
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food & Drug Administration
and Related Agencies
188 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert F. Bennett
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food & Drug Administration
and Related Agencies
123 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member:

As members of the Senate Great Lakes Task Force, we are writing to request your support for two Great Lakes programs in the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food & Drug Administration and Related Agencies Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 appropriations bill. Agriculture represents an important part of the Great Lakes regional economy. However every year, tens of millions of tons of topsoil erode into the waters within the Great Lakes basin, reducing agricultural productivity and degrading water quality. We then spend millions each year to dredge these sediments out of our harbors where they have accumulated. Fortunately, with proper land use practices, these costs, both economic and environmental, can be substantially reduced.

- **We urge the Committee to provide \$5.0 million for the Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control.**

The Great Lakes Basin Program was authorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. The Basin Program is a voluntary, pollution prevention initiative that aids restoration efforts. Moreover, it is a unique, federal-state partnership that addresses the economic and environmental impacts associated with soil erosion and sedimentation, a major source of pollution for the Great Lakes. The goal of the Basin Program is to protect and improve Great Lakes water quality by controlling erosion and sedimentation; limiting the input of associated nutrients and toxic contaminants; and minimizing off-site sources of damages to harbors, streams, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational facilities and the Basin's system of public works. Program elements include program grants and technical assistance, demonstration grants, and information/education activities. In FY-08, the program received \$430,000, and the FY-09 proposed budget does not include any funding.

- **We urge the Committee to provide \$2.0 million for the Agricultural Research Service for Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) testing.**

In October 2006, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) issued a federal order to prevent the spread of VHS, which is a serious disease for freshwater fish. The order stopped the interstate movement within the Great Lakes states of more than three dozen species of live fish that are susceptible to VHS unless they are certified to be free of VHS. The order impacts the federal, state, and provincial hatcheries in the Great Lakes basin that want to move live fish in preparation for the

2007 fishing season. Further, the order impacts bait dealers and shops, commercial fish propagators who raise fish for human consumption, lake and pond stocking, and other related businesses. Some of these operations are located outside of the Great Lakes basin and may not even conduct business in the Great Lakes basin.

To comply with this order without causing undue economic hardship for the fishing, baitfish and aquaculture businesses, we ask that you include \$2.0 million in funding for the Great Lakes states to operate testing facilities to determine whether fish are infected with VHS. The proposed FY-09 budget does not include funds for this testing.

We urge the Committee to give full consideration to our request and thank you for your attention to this important program. If you have questions, please have your staff contact Joy Mulinex at 224-1211.

Sincerely,


George V. Voinovich


Carl Levin


Richard J. Durbin

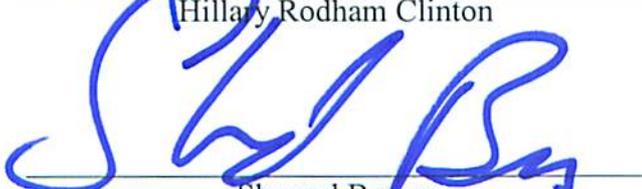

Debbie Stabenow


Robert P. Casey, Jr.


Richard G. Lugar


Hillary Rodham Clinton


Charles E. Schumer


Sherrod Brown