

THE NORTHEAST-MIDWEST HOUSE COALITION

GREAT LAKES TASK FORCE

April 30, 2014

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
Office of the Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building
1400 Independent Avenue SW, Room 200-A
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

On behalf of the Great Lakes Task Force, we write to urge you to designate the Great Lakes Basin as a “Critical Conservation Area” under the Farm Bill’s new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP).

We trust you are aware of the importance and value of the Great Lakes to the region and to the country as a whole. The Great Lakes are the world’s largest system of fresh surface water, providing drinking water for nearly 40 million people. The Lakes are also an economic driver, supporting 1.5 million jobs and generating \$62 billion in wages annually. If the Great Lakes were its own country, it would rank 4th in the world according to its GDP. Great Lakes agriculture generates more than \$15 billion a year in products from livestock, dairy, grain and corn, and accounts for 7% of total U.S. food production. The Lakes’ economy, including agriculture, commerce, transportation, and tourism, depend upon healthy waters to provide the backbone for the region.

The continued health of the Great Lakes and strength of the region’s economy is vital. As the region faces a number of issues including harmful algae blooms due to different sources, attention has been focused on the western Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay, Green Bay and others. State and local groups are acting to address these issues, including the farmers of the Great Lakes watershed, who are committed to responsible stewardship of the land and water resources while producing food, fuel and fiber to support a thriving economy. They seek more opportunities to implement proactive approaches to protect local and regional waters.

Your designation of the Great Lakes as a Critical Conservation Area would assist the region in continuing to find solutions by equipping farmers with tools to implement conservation practices. This assistance will help farmers not only further their efforts to protect the region’s waters, but will also provide them the resources to continue assuring an abundant food supply for the future. The RCP will focus critically needed Federal resources toward realizing the region’s full vitality for the people of the Great Lakes.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Dena Kozanas in Rep. Miller's office at 202-225-2106, Matt McMurray in Rep. Slaughter's office at 202-225-3615, Rachel McCleery in Rep. Dingell's office at 202-225-4071, or Bobby Hamill in Rep. Duffy's office at 202-225-3365.

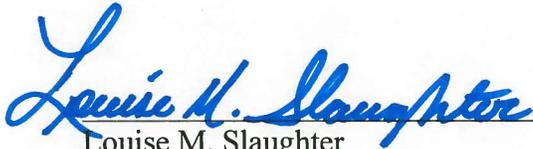
Sincerely,



John D. Dingell
Member of Congress
Great Lakes Task Force,
Democratic Co-Chair



Candice S. Miller
Member of Congress
Great Lakes Task Force,
Republican Co-Chair



Louise M. Slaughter
Member of Congress
Great Lakes Task Force,
Democratic Co-Chair



Sean P. Duffy
Member of Congress
Great Lakes Task Force,
Republican Co-Chair