

Public Comments to the Great Lakes Advisory Board

by

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To the Members of the Great Lakes Advisory Board:

First of all, I would like to thank you [the members of the Advisory Board] for your willingness to serve in such an important capacity at this critical time. As a veteran of a federal Advisory Committee appointed by Interior Secretary Salazar to help launch the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, I know from personal experience how much work is involved, not only in the drafting of recommendations, but also in ensuring that these are acted on in ways that make the best possible use of public resources.

As indicated by Ms. Cestaric, my name is Glenn Odenbrett and I represent the National Center for Science and Civic Engagement, which is dedicated to enhancing undergraduate science education through a focus on major societal issues; restoration of the Great Lakes ecosystem is a perfect example.

Specifically, I direct a project at the Center called GLISTEN, the Great Lakes Innovative Stewardship Through Education Network, which some of the Advisory Board members are already familiar with. With undergraduate faculty and students from over 30 affiliated campuses in all 8 Great Lakes states, GLISTEN fosters campus/community partnerships that build the capacity of community-based and governmental organizations in many Great Lakes Areas of Concern – from local watershed councils to regional and national

parks – to engage in Great Lakes ecosystem restoration and stewardship efforts by incorporating those efforts into the undergraduate curriculum, primarily in the sciences and engineering.

I asked for the opportunity to speak today because such partnerships are critical to addressing most of the Charges you have been discussing over the past two days. As time is limited, I will briefly summarize how campus/community partnerships like GLISTEN's are relevant to these Charges.

Charge # 1:

Climate Change is a topic that is being incorporated into undergraduate classes more and more. GLRI- focused service-learning components of those classes could help develop and implement the climate adaptation strategies of community partners throughout the Great Lakes region.

Charge # 2:

During the Advisory Board's session yesterday, there was a lot of discussion about the need for monitoring – both to set baselines before and evaluate the effectiveness of restoration efforts following the investment of GLRI funding. Undergraduate students and faculty from GLISTEN-affiliated campuses are already engaged at the subwatershed level in providing baseline data on nutrient loading and controlling invasive species. In the Saginaw Bay watershed, they are helping the local stormwater management agency with outreach to landowners. In the Upper Maumee River watershed, they are assisting the local watershed partnership in developing a watershed management plan. With respect to some of the ecosystem threats faced by tribes in the Lake Superior watershed, they are already helping tribal leaders assess the potential impact of recently-approved mining activity upstream from a Chippewa reservation in Wisconsin. Direct GLRI support could increase such activities exponentially.

Charges # 4 & 5:

By explicitly identifying it as a key leveraging strategy, the GLRI could tap into millions of dollars of federal Work-Study funds awarded to college and university students on campuses in the Great Lakes ecosystem every year. Such use of Work-Study funds would directly meet the original intent of the Congress in establishing the Work-Study program: to provide meaningful career- or academically-related work to enrolled students.

By doing so, the GLRI could create many more jobs that engage college students in actual restoration work; these could easily be tracked by student employment offices on campuses like the ones affiliated with GLISTEN. They could – and should - be para-professional jobs engaging students in restoration efforts year-round: that is, embedded full-time in community-based and governmental organizations during the summer, then deployed as peer leaders of undergraduate service-learning components of courses on their campuses benefiting those same organizations during the following academic year. These students would then be well-positioned to become the next generation of professional Great Lakes restoration stewards. The restoration capacity-building, multiplier effect that such leadership jobs would create is only limited by investments made in the students themselves – dollar for dollar, a very cost-effective strategy.

Charge # 6:

Undergraduate science and engineering faculty and students could provide the means for applying scientific indicators on the ground.

So let's use them in all the ways I have briefly mentioned, and more. To do so, the GLAB should make the engagement of undergraduate faculty and students in the work of Great Lakes restoration an explicit priority.

Should there be a subcommittee of the Advisory Board established to explore this issue in greater depth, I would be delighted to serve on it.

Thank you.