

## Draft Charge Question Ideas

July 19, 2016 – Draft for Discussion Purposes Only

### Introduction

To provide as much time as possible for the development of Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Action Plan 3 (AP3), the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force (IATF) is providing these charge question ideas to the Great Lakes Advisory Board (GLAB) for feedback. The IATF will then finalize and submit charge questions to the GLAB. The IATF will also provide a draft timeline separately.

Each charge question below starts with an enumerated general, overarching question(s) that is followed by sub-questions to further probe the subject of the enumerated general question. Then, the general and sub-questions are followed by a section titled “Context” to provide policy foundations or assumptions (the GLAB does not need to respond to Context).

All references to “the GLAB” in these charge questions are meant to refer to the Board, including its Science and Information Subcommittee (SIS) should the GLAB want to delegate questions to it for assistance.

### Charge Questions

- (1) Scope of AP3: Do the focus areas in GLRI Action Plan 2 (AP2) address the most significant stressors and needs for the Great Lakes ecosystem? In other words, assuming that resource levels remain at approximately \$300M annually, should AP3 generally include the same focus areas as AP2?
  - (A) If additional or different needs must be addressed under GLRI, which stressors do he GLAB recommend that AP3 address?
  - (B) If additional needs must be addressed under GLRI, which stressors should be defunded (or see funding decreased) to accommodate funding for those additional stressors?
  - (C) How can GLRI Measures of Progress better quantify annual progress toward ecological *outcomes* resulting from GLRI funding while recognizing that annual changes to the Great Lakes ecosystem – and possibly even local components of the Great Lakes ecosystem – may be difficult, if not impossible, to measure at least on a year-to-year basis? *This is a reinterpretation of the April 4 Charge Questions. These are not intended to be additional charge questions. This charge question is included here to recognize that the SIS’s current work to consider outcomes, outputs and longevity should be incorporated into this set of charge questions to help inform the development of AP3 instead of being considered isolated charge questions.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> April 4 Charge Questions about the “longevity” of impacts were intended to help answer this question. See, <https://www.glri.us/advisory/pdfs/duration-longevity-draft-response-20160404-5pp.pdf>.

Context (1): Because of the progress yet to be made under the current Focus Areas (e.g., work to restore Areas of Concern, prevent invasive species, reduce harmful algae, etc.), the IATF presumes it should (if not must) maintain momentum under the five current Focus Areas. However, if other more significant stressors exist, or if different approaches to addressing current stressors (e.g., more ecological outcome-based Measures of Progress) are advised, IATF will consider. Note that Congress has limited the use of GLRI funds for infrastructure and water quantity projects, though these might be considered among top stressors.

- (2) What are the top most significant ways in which the Adaptive Management Pilot Project can be strengthened to ensure the implementation of the Adaptive Management Process is successful?
- (A) Are the Terms of Reference easily understandable for stakeholders who are not experts in Adaptive Management?
- (B) What mechanisms are best used to ensure that the results of the Adaptive Management Pilot are communicated to a wide-enough audience to ensure that such results will be incorporated into future funding decisions?

Context: In September 2015, the Great Lakes Advisory Board provided broad advice to the IATF about adaptive management.<sup>2</sup> In January 2016, the IATF issued its first version of the Adaptive Management Process.<sup>3</sup> IATF now seeks advice, through the pilot project, to ensure the federal agencies are planning for effective implementation of adaptive management.

- (3) How can GLRI investments be more effective in getting sustainable runoff reduction practices established that will reduce harmful algal blooms, hypoxia, and other water quality threats from agricultural areas?
- (A) What specific approaches does the GLAB recommend to help achieve its recommendation from December 2013 that “funding priority should be given to projects in communities that demonstrate a commitment to implement comprehensive conservation farm plans that are sustainable and perpetual.”<sup>4</sup>
- (B) Given the length of time it takes to institute such of the sustainable practices, what AP3 annual Measure(s) of Progress should be developed to measure demonstrable *and sustainable* progress toward ecological outcomes while at the same time providing sufficient time for such sustainable practices to work?
- (C)

Context: While the Great Lakes community is making steady progress in many of the focus areas, more effective action is needed to reduce nutrient runoff from agricultural lands. The IATF has attempted to implement GLAB’s recommendation: “funding priority should be given to projects in communities that demonstrate a commitment to implement comprehensive

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<sup>2</sup> See, <https://www.glri.us/advisory/pdfs/glab-final-recommendations-adaptive-mgmt-201509.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See, <https://www.glri.us/advisory/pdfs/glri-adaptive-mgmt-process-v1-201601-14pp.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> See, <https://www.glri.us/pdfs/glab-report-20131223.pdf>, page 7.

conservation farm plans that are sustainable and perpetual.”<sup>5</sup> However, the IATF has experienced several barriers to making short-term progress through sustainable runoff reduction approaches. For example, it has found limited capacity for conservation easements (e.g., through land trusts, etc.) in upstream Maumee River watershed areas; the few stakeholders who can provide some capacity require agriculture easements to secure interest from willing producers; an inconsistent “patchwork” of strategically-targeted lands for easements, etc. And, where these barriers can be overcome, the IATF has found that it could take many times the amount of time to undertake these “sustainable approaches” than undertaking traditional conservation practices.

- (4) Should GLRI invest in efforts to understand future threats and communicate them to the Great Lakes community for action?
- (A) How should GLRI begin in investing in efforts to forecast future threats? Should it start with a pilot project? Should it invest in a single effort? Or should it seed various efforts, complementing, for example, Blue Accounting, Great Lakes Inform, or other similar platforms to build forecasting capacity?
- (B) What kind of platform (both internally with the database and externally with a dashboard, for example) is necessary so that the interface between data and accessibility so that wide scale public use of the platform is possible?
- (C) What other recommendations does the GLAB have to help inform the development of this complex matter?

Context: the IATF and GLAB agree that the GLRI “protection’ and “restoration” are not distinct imperatives.<sup>6</sup> However, “protection” has an inherent disadvantage to “restoration.” With restoration, damage has already occurred. Agencies and stakeholders have the benefit of investing in work to understand the damage and mitigate it. There is often public urgency to “respond” to damage. However, with “protection,” agencies and stakeholders do not have the benefit of “20/20 hindsight” to clearly understand and fix damage. With protection, the damage has not occurred, so getting public attention may not be as easy. As such, a forecasting mechanism is vital to use large pools of data to signal developing threats that require protection efforts.

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<sup>5</sup> See, <https://www.glri.us/pdfs/qlab-report-20131223.pdf>, page 7.

<sup>6</sup> The IATF adopted the Board’s December 2013 recommendations that the GLRI continue to invest in protection and restoration projects (see, “Recommendations to the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force on the Development of the FY2015-2019 Great Lakes Restoration Initiative,” <https://www.glri.us/pdfs/qlab-report-20131223.pdf>, p. 5). Adoption of this recommendation was explicit at the beginning of and throughout Action Plan 2 (see, e.g., page 2 of Action Plan 2 at <https://www.glri.us/actionplan/pdfs/qlri-action-plan-2.pdf>).