

Draft Charge Questions

October 12, 2016

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 questions to the Great Lakes Advisory Board (GLAB). The IATF will 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 the SIS for assistance.

Charge Questions

- (1) Scope of AP3: Do the focus areas in GLRI Action Plan 2 (AP2) adequately 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 stressors or needs should be addressed under AP3, what are they?
 - (B) If additional stressors or needs should be addressed under GLRI, which stressors or needs should be defunded (or see funding decreased) to accommodate funding for those additional stressors/needs?

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 them for possible inclusion in AP3. 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) Public Engagement: What does the Board recommend to ensure *effective* public input into the development of AP3 beyond seeking advice from GLAB?

Context: The IATF seeks “effective” public engagement, that is, adequate opportunities for the public to inform the development of AP3. Because of the need for AP3 development to be coordinated with other federal agencies, GLAB, OMB and others before finalization, *effective* input means input that can ensure the IATF stays on schedule and that will result in the greatest opportunity for the greatest number of interested stakeholders for successful AP3 development and implementation. The IATF does not contemplate ongoing public outreach. A draft timeline for AP3 development can be provided to GLAB if requested.

- (3) Runoff Reduction: How can GLRI investments be more effective in getting sustainable runoff reduction practices established or by exploring treatment technologies that will reduce nutrient loadings that contribute to harmful algal blooms, hypoxia, and other water quality threats from agricultural areas?
- (A) What specific approaches are recommended by the GLAB 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.”¹
- (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?

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 conservation farm plans that are sustainable and perpetual.”² 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 a much longer time to undertake these “sustainable approaches” than annual measures of progress might allow.

- (4) Protection: Should GLRI invest in efforts to understand long-term future threats and communicate them to the Great Lakes community for action?
- (A) How should GLRI begin investing in efforts to forecast future threats beyond AP3? Should it start with a forecasting 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?

¹ See, <https://www.glri.us/pdfs/glab-report-20131223.pdf>, page 7.

² See, <https://www.glri.us/pdfs/glab-report-20131223.pdf>, page 7.

(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 can be as useful as possible to the public?

Context: the IATF and GLAB agree that the GLRI “protection” and “restoration” are not distinct imperatives.³ 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 work to 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, targeted local monitoring may be vital to address some threats while a forecasting mechanism may be vital in order to use large pools of data to signal developing threats that require protection efforts.

³ 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/glab-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/glri-action-plan-2.pdf>).