

Questions for GLAB Regarding Duration or Longevity of GLRI Project Impacts

Purpose: As the GLRI agencies make more progress in achieving measures of progress under GLRI Action Plan II, the agencies seek advice for project selection that will have long lasting ecosystem benefits. These charge questions are submitted to the Great Lakes Advisory Board (GLAB) to provide input on how to compare and prioritize proposals for GLRI funding that have significant differences in the duration or longevity of their ecosystem benefits including both outputs and outcomes. The purpose of these questions is to inform future decision making, not to revise GLRI Action Plan II.

Background: GLRI Action Plan II includes measures of progress that are time-sensitive and others that are less time-sensitive. Measures that are less time-sensitive will generate the same level of ecological benefits regardless of whether the action lasts one year, ten years, or forever (e.g., number of studies, number of projects, number of beneficial use impairments eliminated, etc.). There are other measures for which the duration of the action or its ecological benefits is highly important when comparing such benefits. These include actions that have time-based metrics (e.g., pounds per year of phosphorus reduction achieved) or have measures of progress (e.g., miles/acres restored) where the level and duration of outputs or outcomes from the proposed actions are critical to establishing a sustainable change or improvement.

Using GLRI Action Plan II, comparisons of proposals for GLRI funding include consideration of their outputs (measures of progress) within the timeframe of the five-year action plan. Outputs and outcomes that occur beyond this timeframe do not always contribute to the achievement of Action Plan II targets and, therefore, are not as easily factored into the priority setting for funding. Using this practice, lower cost proposals that deliver outputs only within the Action Plan II timeframe (5 years or less) may be ranked as a higher priority than more costly proposals which deliver outputs that last much longer (e.g., 50 years).

To compare and prioritize proposals for GLRI funding, federal agencies need a technically-sound method for comparing proposals that have different longevitys. Without such a framework, it is difficult to consistently compare proposals for an action lasting five years with those of another action lasting 50 years. This is especially relevant for measures where the actions must be in place for extended timeframes to deliver the desired outcomes (e.g., invasive species prevention measures; nutrient reductions in a watershed which result in diminished algae blooms in downstream lake).

Charge Questions for GLAB:

- 1) For which of the GLRI measures of progress is the duration or longevity of ecosystem benefits from a GLRI-funded action most critical?
- 2) How should the duration or longevity of ecosystem benefits be considered when comparing various proposals for GLRI funding?
- 3) What level and type of documentation on the duration or longevity of ecosystem benefits should accompany GLRI funding proposals?
- 4) Are there any models or other tools that the GLAB would recommend for estimating the duration or longevity of ecosystem benefits from GLRI-funded actions?