

An Environment America Report on: **Our great waters**



Lake Tahoe



The Puget Sound



The Columbia River



The Great Lakes



The Long Island Sound



The San Francisco Bay



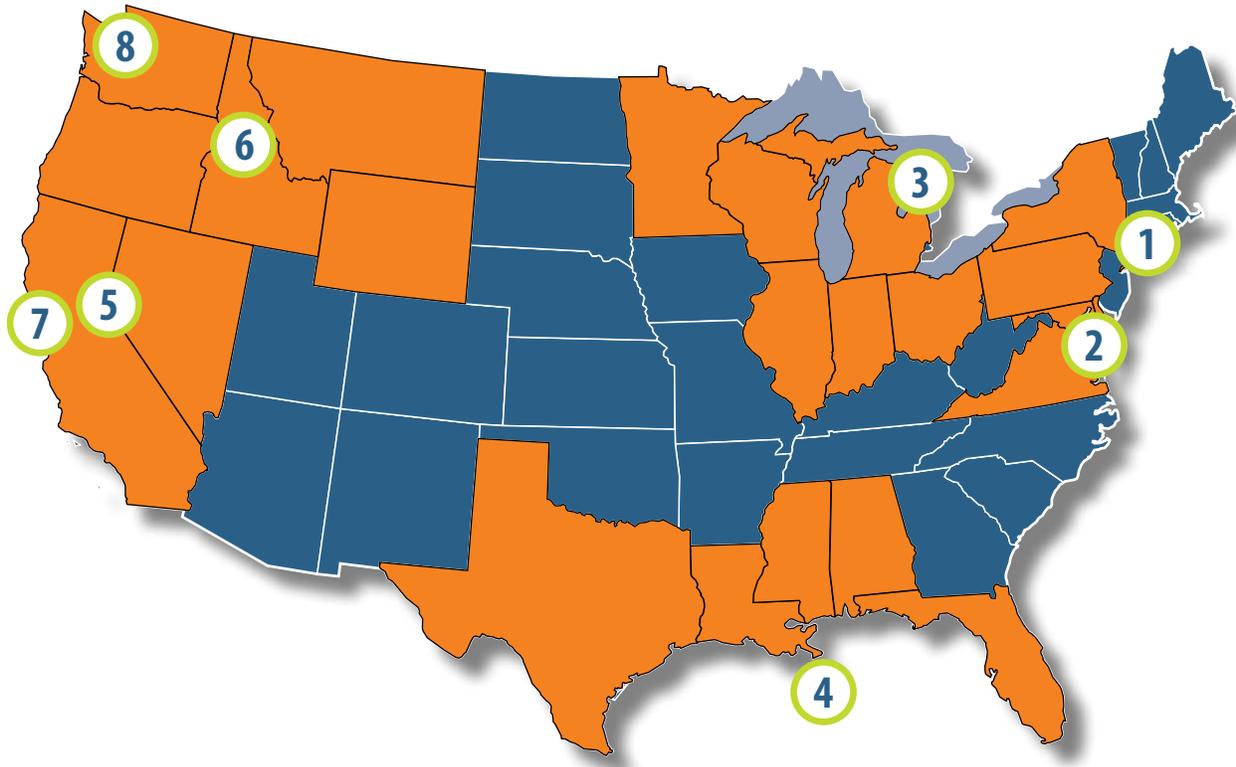
The Gulf of Mexico



The Chesapeake Bay

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An Environment America Report on: **Our great waters**

Executive summary

From the Chesapeake Bay to the Puget Sound to the Great Lakes to the San Francisco Bay, Americans throughout the country depend on our waters for fishing, recreation and clean drinking water. These waters are the home to some of our most cherished wildlife, like orcas, blue crabs and bald eagles. American families from coast to coast travel to our great waters every summer to relax and enjoy some of nature's wonders. And year round our great waters are host to some of America's great cities, including San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago, Baltimore and New Orleans. Our waters are integral to the economies of these cities and their surrounding areas. With robust tourism industries and longstanding fishing trades dependent on clean water, protecting our great waterways is necessary for both our environment and our economy.

Unfortunately, our waters continue to be plagued by high levels of pollution. A few miles from the nation's capitol, mega-chicken producers generate 1 million tons of manure waste, much of which ends up in the Chesapeake Bay. Across the country in just one year, industrial facilities dumped 232 million pounds of toxic chemicals into our waters. And twenty-four billion gallons of sewage are dumped annually into the Great Lakes alone.

Excess nutrient pollution coming from mega-agricultural productions and runoff from developed areas is causing massive algae blooms in a number of our great waters. These algae blooms consume the oxygen in the water, resulting in dead zones where no aquatic life can survive. During the summer, enormous dead zones can be found in Long Island Sound, Chesapeake Bay, the Gulf of Mexico, the Great Lakes, and the Puget Sound. The dead zone in Lake Erie has grown to be larger than the state of Connecticut.

Dead zones, toxic chemicals, and the destruction of wetlands around our great waters are significantly damaging to the health of the ecosystems, wildlife, and people who depend on them. Salmon populations in the Columbia River and Puget Sound have dropped dramatically over the last century. And in the Chesapeake Bay, oyster populations are at 1 percent of their historic numbers. Depleted fish and aquatic life can have devastating effects on the fishermen that make their living off these waters and the recreational sport fishing that contributes to local economies.

The environmental significance of these waters is unparalleled and the enjoyment that they add to our lives is unquestionable. The contribution our waters make to our local, regional, and national economies spans many sectors, and it will take a comprehensive effort to protect them. One of the largest economic engines that our great waters fuel is the tourism industry. People travel across the country and world to visit them. For example, every year, the revenue generated from the recreation, tourism and fishing industries in the Long Island Sound exceeds \$5.5 billion. These environmental treasures and the economic benefits they provide can only continue to exist if the beauty and health of these waters are maintained.

To restore and protect our great waters, Environment America is calling on Congress to pass legislation this summer that will reduce pollution, increase investments in restoration efforts, and protect our most treasured places for generations to come. This report highlights the following eight waters across the country that are in the most need of increased protections and immediate restoration efforts: Long Island Sound, Chesapeake Bay, the Gulf of Mexico, Lake Tahoe, the Puget Sound, the Columbia River, the San Francisco Bay and the Great Lakes.



Our great waters Long Island Sound



Stretching across all of southern Connecticut to New York, Long Island Sound is one of New England's treasures. The Sound provides a habitat for more than 1,000 species of marine life, including 170 species of fish, and dozens of species of migratory birds for at least part of the year. The Long Island Sound watershed is also home to nearly 9 million people.¹ During the summer, millions travel to the Sound's beaches to relax, swim and boat. The wildlife of the Sound make it a popular destination for bird-watching and attracts commercial and recreational shellfishers and anglers.

Beach closings

Toxic chemicals from underfunded sewage facilities and runoff pollution are destroying the health of the Sound and threatening aquatic life. This was evident in 2009 when beaches in Connecticut were closed for 135 days of the year due to pollution.³ Farther out in the Sound, water quality suffers from high levels of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus that come from stormwater and agricultural runoff. These nutrients create algae blooms that suck all the oxygen out of the water, causing expansive dead zones where nothing can survive.

Reduce pollution

To clean up the Sound, we need to stop the excess pollution coming from sewage treatment facilities and the runoff coming from stormwater and mega-agricultural operations. Sewage treatment facilities need to be upgraded, and growing cities need to be given the resources to account for the influx of waste. Pollution reduction standards in Connecticut and New York are already helping reduce the pollution going into the Sound, but since other states also contribute to the problem, they need to be part of the solution. States including Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont also need to set limits on the amount of pollution they allow into the rivers that flow into the Sound.

Restoration and Stewardship Act

S. 3119: Legislation to restore Long Island Sound, the Long Island Sound Restoration and Stewardship Act of 2009 (S. 3119), has been introduced by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (NY). By combining the re-authorizations of two acts that will expire in the coming year (the Long Island Sound Restoration Act and the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act), this bill provides streamlined funding for essential restoration programs. The focus is on habitat protection initiatives, improvements in water quality, and increased public oversight of how funding is spent.

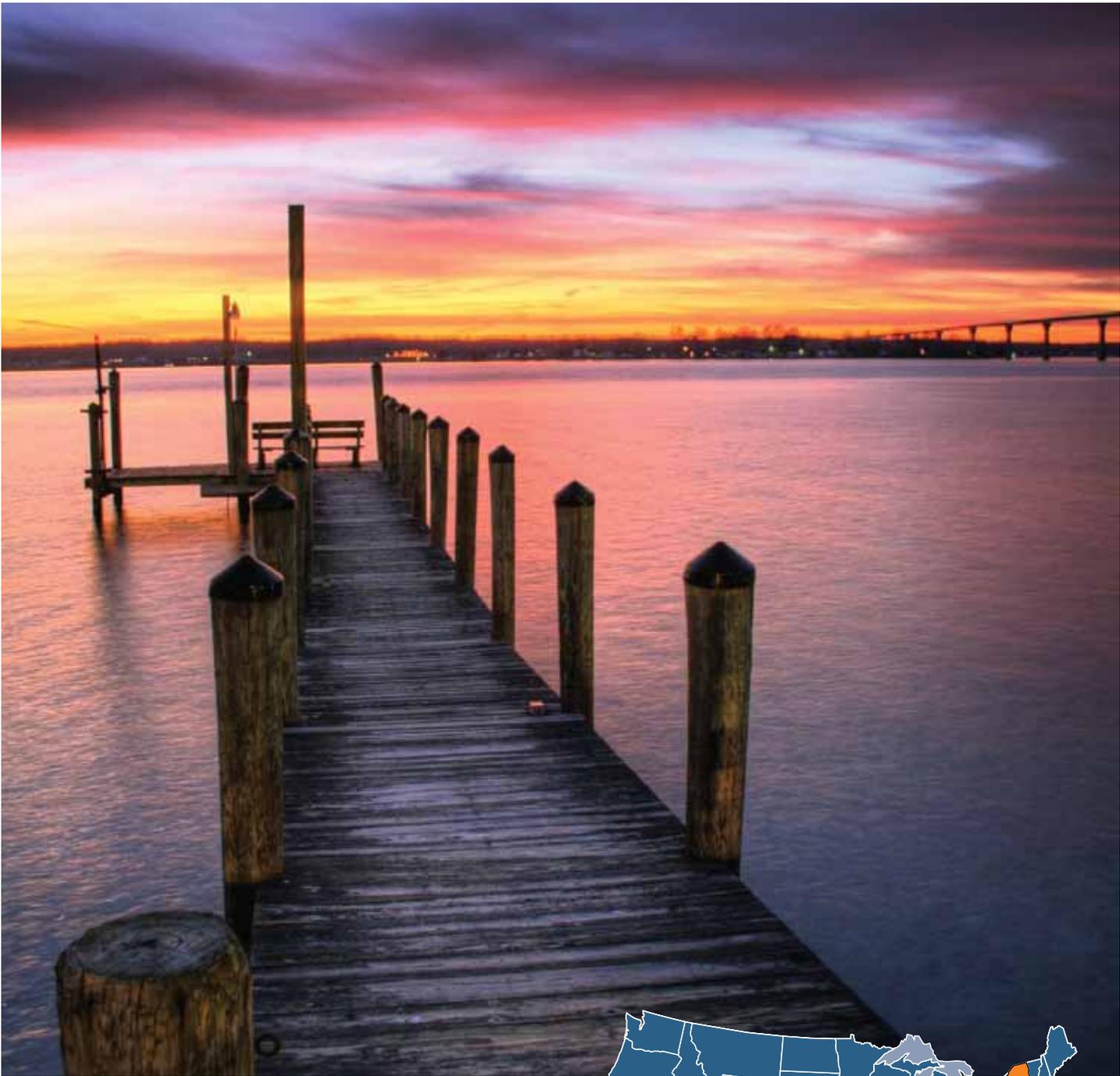
Quick facts

Long Island Sound

► *The revenue generated from the recreation, tourism and fishing industries in the Sound exceeds \$5.5 billion annually.²*

► *In 2008, the dead zone in the Sound grew to 180 square miles, more than seven times the size of Manhattan.*





Our great waters Chesapeake Bay



The Chesapeake Bay watershed includes over 100,000 rivers and streams, providing six states—Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the entire District of Columbia—with invaluable natural resources and significant economic revenue. The Bay and its tidal tributaries have a shoreline that spans over 11,500 miles, which is more than the entire U.S. west coast. As the largest estuary in the United States, the Chesapeake Bay is a commercial and recreational resource for the more than 16 million people who live in its watershed.⁴ People also travel from across the region to enjoy the beaches, crab shacks and other attractions of the Bay. The renowned wildlife of the Bay includes more than 3,600 species of plants, fish and animals, including the bald eagle and blue crab.⁵

Growing dead zone

Unfortunately, the Bay's wildlife and the health are threatened by pollution from industrial waste, outdated sewage plants, and runoff from reckless development and agricultural practices. All this pollution has led to excess nutrients ending up in the Bay, creating a dead zone that in some summers spans over one third of the Bay. The growing dead zone, combined with other pollution, has had an extremely detrimental effect on all of those who depend on the Bay, from the oysters and crabs, to the fishermen. Native oyster populations today survive at less than 1 percent of their historic numbers.⁷ With fewer oysters and shellfish, the watermen who make a living from the Bay are feeling the effects. Historically, the oyster population was able to filter and clean all the water of the Bay in three days. Now, the reduced oyster population takes almost a year to filter the Bay's water.

Start holding polluters accountable

For 25 years, we have depended on voluntary measures to encourage polluters to reduce the waste they are putting into the Bay. This is not working. In order to restore the Bay, we need measures that require strong pollution reductions and hold polluters accountable. The executive order issued by President Obama has spurred the EPA to assess the state of the Bay and release plans to require state action for cleaning up the Bay. This plan sets goals for pollution reductions and brings much-needed EPA attention to the significant degradation of the Bay. However, the executive order is only a part of the solution. To fully restore the Bay and protect it for future generations, we need congressional action.

Clean Water and Ecosystem Restoration Act

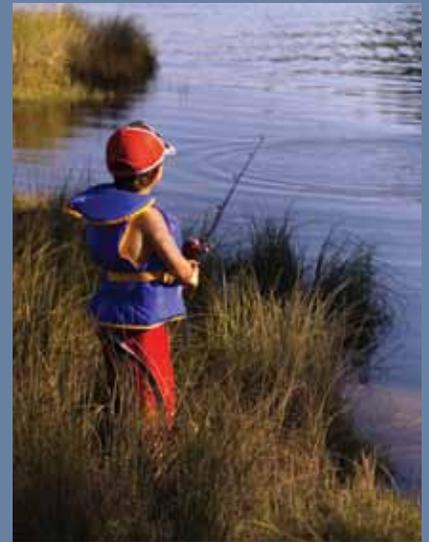
S. 1816 & H.R. 3852: The Chesapeake Clean Water and Ecosystem Restoration Act (S.1816, H.R. 3852) was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Benjamin Cardin (MD) and in the House by Rep. Elijah Cummings (MD). These bills will set up new tools for enforcing pollution limits and provide the resources to achieve the goals we need for a clean Bay. Specifically, the legislation will: 1) Reinforce the Bay pollution limits established by the EPA; 2) Require pollution reductions from all point and non-point sources that are dumping in the Bay watershed; 3) Establish a nitrogen trading program, allowing businesses and farmers in the Bay watershed to exchange credits and make a profit by reducing their pollution; 4) Establish guidelines for land-use to achieve better water quality; and 5) Allocate funds and grants for projects to restore the Bay and to establish the proper oversight programs.

Quick facts

Chesapeake Bay

► *The Chesapeake Bay is the highest yielding estuary for shellfish and fish in the U.S. and the source of about \$1 trillion in annual revenue, primarily from recreation and seafood.⁶*

► *In fact, mega-chicken producers like Tyson and Perdue produce over 1 million tons of chicken manure every year, much of which ends up in the Bay.*





Our great waters The Great Lakes



The Great Lakes are some of our nation's most revered natural places. People across the country have spent summers on the beaches of Lake Michigan or hiking trails in Pictured Rocks at Lake Superior. Beyond their beauty, the Great Lakes are an integral part of the Midwest culture and way of life. The Great Lakes span eight states and represent 95 percent of the country's fresh surface water. The Great Lakes also provide drinking water for over 33 million people.⁸ A recent survey of biological diversity identified 130 globally endangered or rare plant and animal species that inhabit the Great Lakes ecosystem.⁹

Destroying wetlands

The Great Lakes face ongoing problems like toxic hot spots and sewage overflows, and new and more urgent threats like the Asian carp. Overdevelopment, along with habitat destruction is resulting in the loss of the wetlands around the Great Lakes. The wetlands are crucial habitat for wildlife, like the endangered piping plover, and help filter toxic chemicals and clean the lakes.¹² Right now, wetlands surrounding the Great Lakes are being lost at a rate of 20,000 acres per year. With only 400,000 acres of wetlands left in the Great Lakes Basin, at this rate, we will destroy all the wetlands in 20 years. In addition, nutrient pollution coming from mega-agribusiness is creating a dead zone in Lake Erie that has grown to larger than 10,000 square kilometers, larger than the size of Connecticut.¹³ Paving over the wetlands and polluting the Great Lakes puts at risk both the health of millions of people and the economies of eight states.

Increased restoration efforts

Restoring the Great Lakes will require significant effort and investment. We need to upgrade sewage treatment facilities, cut pollution from mega-agribusinesses, and address invasive species. Moreover, polluters should be held accountable for their waste and the damage they are doing to our natural resources. Local and federal agencies working in the Great Lakes region also need the resources to enforce permits and ensure that current pollution reduction standards are being met. Furthermore, to repair the damage that has already been done to the lakes, we need robust restoration efforts and programs to coordinate and oversee these efforts. President Obama proposed, and Congress funded, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to accelerate these efforts.

Ecosystem Protection Act

S. 3073 & H.R. 4755: The Great Lakes Ecosystem Protection Act of 2010 (S. 3073, H.R. 4755), has been introduced in the Senate by Sen. Carl Levin (MI) and in the House by Rep. Vern Ehlers (MI). These bills set up the structure needed to coordinate restoration efforts and make sure they are efficient and effective. This will require significant involvement by local organizations and coordination between states. This legislation also provides significant funding by establishing the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to implement high-priority projects that restore the fragile ecosystem and protect against new threats, like Asian carp.

Quick facts

The Great Lakes

▶ *The Great Lakes are a source of \$15 billion annually in tourism revenue, with Lake Erie alone generating \$9 billion.¹⁰*

▶ *Each year, 24 billion gallons of sewage pollution are dumped into the Great Lakes.¹¹*





Our great waters The Gulf of Mexico



The current oil spill in the Gulf has brought new attention to the resources provided by the Gulf of Mexico. Not only is the Gulf of Mexico famed for its extensive coastline, but it also boasts some of the most productive fisheries in the world. With more than 1.5 billion pounds of commercial fish and shellfish harvested annually, these fisheries depend on a healthy ecosystem to generate revenue.¹⁶ A significant portion of the Gulf's economic value is also driven by a \$20 billion tourism industry, with visitors coming to the Gulf every year to boat, fish and relax. In addition, Louisiana alone contains 40 percent of the nation's coastal wetlands, which are important habitats and provide essential protection from flooding.¹⁷

Disastrous effects

Beyond the damage of the ongoing BP oil spill, water quality in the Gulf is threatened by excess pollution flowing from the Mississippi River and coming from industrial facilities and corporate agricultural operations. This has led to a dead zone in the Gulf that grew to be almost 8,000 sq. miles in 2008, which is roughly the size of the state of New Jersey.¹⁸ Now, with the largest oil spill in American history occurring in the Gulf, the extent of the long-term effects of the oil on water quality, wildlife and the regional economy is unknown.

Long-term commitment

Now more than ever, the Gulf's fisheries and beautiful shores are in need of serious protection. We need legislation to limit the toxic pollution and agricultural runoff that is constantly flowing into the Gulf. The wetlands in Louisiana and across the Gulf need to be protected from development. Oversight is needed to coordinate and monitor the restoration effort. And finally, the damage from the oil spill is going to require a national effort and a long-term commitment to restoring the waters and wildlife of the Gulf.

Restoration and Protection Act

S. 1311: Legislation to restore the Gulf of Mexico, the Gulf of Mexico Restoration and Protection Act (S. 1311), was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Roger Wicker (MS). This bill will provide funding needed to implement and coordinate restoration efforts to clean up and preserve the Gulf. It establishes a Gulf of Mexico Office within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to coordinate Gulf-related programs. The bill will foster measurable improvements in water quality and the development of publicly available information about the resources and environmental quality of the Gulf. In addition, the bill will provide grants for monitoring, research and strategy development.

Quick facts

The Gulf of Mexico

- ▶ *The Gulf of Mexico's shores and beaches support a \$20 billion tourism industry.¹⁴*
- ▶ *The Gulf led in production of oysters in 2008, with 20.6 million pounds of meat valued at \$60.2 million and representing 59 percent of the national total.*
- ▶ *Four of the top five U.S. states in total surface discharge of toxic chemicals—Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas—are located on the Gulf coast.¹⁵*
- ▶ *Tourism in Florida attracts more than 80 million visitors a year—employing nearly 1 million Floridians.¹⁵*



Our great waters Lake Tahoe

With crystal-clear water surrounded by amazing mountains, Lake Tahoe is known as a premier ski and recreational destination. People travel from across the country and around the world to visit Lake Tahoe year-round. Visitors come to Lake Tahoe to swim, wake-board, jet-ski and boat. The vast appeal and well-developed tourism industry of Lake Tahoe creates significant economic gains for the region. In 2002, visitors to the lake's north shore spent \$355 million and its tourism industry generated more than 6,900 jobs.²¹

New threats

Unfortunately, new roads and increased development are creating more pollution runoff into Lake Tahoe. This is reflected in the decline in the lake's famed water clarity. Pollution flowing into the lake—primarily nutrients, sediment and toxic chemicals such as mercury and lead—is threatening the health of the lake and making it vulnerable to new threats. Lake Tahoe is experiencing rapid increases in invasive species such as the quagga mussel, which has reached a population size of about 3 trillion since its introduction in 2007.²² In addition, poor forest management increases the risk of wildfires and is destroying the forest that surrounds the lake. Right now, approximately 25 percent of the trees in the Lake Tahoe Basin are either dead or dying.²³

An integrated approach

To protect Lake Tahoe we need to address the variety of problems facing the lake. First, we need to stop the initial pollution from entering the lake by mitigating and preventing runoff pollution from developments and roads. Second, we need to repair the damage already done with restoration efforts and initiatives to remove invasive species. Third, we need to address potential threats by requiring better forest management.

Restoration Act

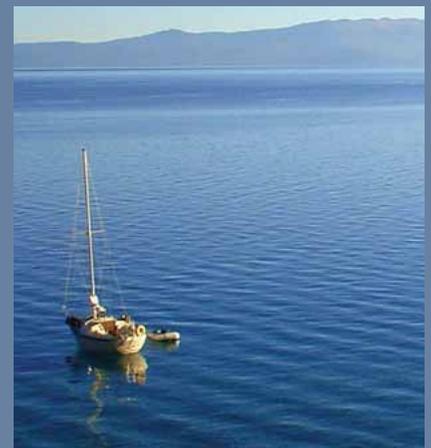
S. 2724 & H.R. 4001: Legislation to protect Lake Tahoe, the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2009 (S. 2724, H.R. 4001), was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Harry Reid (NV) and in the House by Rep. Dean Heller (NV). These bills will begin to confront the growing threats of invasive species, achieve pollution limits and address water quality problems in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Specifically, the bills would expand upon existing restoration efforts, and provide eight years of funding for programs through the Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program. The projects funded will focus on stormwater management, controlling the introduction of new invasive species and removing existing ones, the reintroduction of native fish species, improved forest management and public education.

Quick facts

Lake Tahoe

▶ *Lake Tahoe's tourism industry employs more than 23,000 people, generating over \$1.6 billion in annual income.¹⁹*

▶ *In the last 40 years the visibility in Lake Tahoe has declined by 28 percent.²⁰*





Our great waters The Columbia River



For the Northwest, the Columbia River and its tributaries are an integral part of the region's culture, economy and famed salmon population. Within the seven states and one Canadian province it reaches into, the Columbia River and its tributaries drain an area the size of France.²⁴ The Columbia River has been a popular recreation site for sailing, swimming and other water sports since the beginning of the twentieth century, and now windsurfers from across the world consider the Hood River and the Dalles River, both tributaries of the Columbia River, to be premiere windsurfing destinations. Tourism and the salmon populations in the Columbia River Basin contribute significantly to local and regional economies. Traditionally, the Columbia River Basin and its tributaries were the largest salmon-producing river system in the world.

Toxic pollution

Unfortunately, high levels of toxic pollution continue to flow into the Columbia River, ranked eighth in the United States for its load of cancer-causing chemicals in 2007.²⁸ The pollution, along with destruction of the habitats along the Columbia River, has caused a dramatic drop in salmon populations. Pollution in the Columbia River Basin is exacerbated as the reservoirs trap pollutants, many of which have been circulating within the basin for decades. Industrial solvents and pesticides that are now outlawed, such as PCBs and DDT, are still present in the river. Left unchecked, the continued pollution of the Columbia River from industrial facilities will have exponential effects and further damage the already devastated salmon population.

Protecting the salmon

We need to protect the Columbia River Basin from pollution, and implement restoration efforts to rehabilitate damaged habitat and rejuvenate endangered species. To reduce pollution going into the Columbia River, we need to extend protections to the entire basin and ensure water quality in the tributaries that flow into the Columbia River. We also need to reduce the amount of toxic chemicals coming from industrial facilities and runoff from the mega-agriculture facilities. We also need targeted restoration efforts to recover the salmon population and other aquatic life damaged by years of excess pollution and habitat loss.

Restoration Act

S. 3025 & H.R. 4625: The Columbia River Restoration Act of 2010 (S. 3025, H.R. 4652), introduced in the Senate by Sen. Jeff Merkley (OR) and in the House by Rep. Earl Blumenauer (OR), will provide funding and oversight for projects to restore the Columbia River Basin. This legislation will implement projects and studies to address extreme levels of toxic pollution and provide resources for endangered species recovery. The bill will also expand pollution reduction plans to include headwater states and set up new oversight structures to make sure the projects are being implemented efficiently and effectively.

Quick facts

The Columbia River

- ▶ In Washington, Oregon, and Idaho the salmon industry alone supports about 3,600 jobs.²⁵
- ▶ Salmon populations in the Columbia River have dropped drastically: Thirteen species of salmon native to the river are listed as endangered.²⁶
- ▶ The salmon industry generates about \$142 million annually in total personal income to communities on the West Coast.²⁷





Our great waters The San Francisco Bay



The San Francisco Bay, like the community that surrounds it, is a unique and historic place. The Bay is also an important habitat for wildlife, supporting over 500 species of wildlife, including 23 endangered species. This wildlife helps maintain the Bay's ecosystem, which in turn contributes to the \$890 million in fish sales generated in California each year. With the major cities along the shores of the Bay attracting millions of visitors every year, the economic value of the Bay is hard to quantify. What is clear is that both the tourism and fishing industries in the Bay depend on clean water and a healthy habitat. Beyond its direct economic benefits, the San Francisco Bay is a crucial stopover for millions of shorebirds on their yearly migration routes and its tidal marshes provide a buffer against destructive weather on the open water.

Years of pollution

Shoreline development, release of toxic chemicals, loss of wetlands, and pollution from cars and other sources are taking a toll on the Bay. Restoration plans in place to remediate some of the most damaged wetlands in the San Francisco Bay are underfunded and understaffed. More than 100,000 acres of drained wetlands have been ready for restoration for over a decade.³⁰ With too much pollution and not enough resources to combat the damage, the water quality of the Bay is suffering, wildlife and fish populations are threatened, and wetlands are being lost.

Wetland restoration

In order to restore the Bay we need a serious restoration effort, and the resources to implement it. Upfront prevention of pollution dumped and running off into the Bay is a crucial first step to restoring the Bay. Improving wetlands and preventing dangerous developments along the shores will help to rebuild the Bay's natural buffers and wildlife habitats. Wetlands protect communities from flooding, and also naturally filter pollution flowing into the Bay. Restoring wetlands could save billions of dollars in public funds to address damages caused by flooding and other environmental damages.

Improvement Act

H.R. 5061: To restore the San Francisco Bay, Rep. Jackie Speier (CA) has introduced the San Francisco Bay Improvement Act of 2010 (H.R. 5061). This bill will establish and provide funding for programs to improve the water quality of the Bay and restore wetlands and wildlife. This bill includes a commitment to finance the restoration of over 100,000 acres of tidal wetlands, the preservation of which will create new economic infusions and provide protection against the mounting effects of sea level rise. The bill will also create a public education campaign to raise awareness about the need to protect the Bay and set up an oversight council to coordinate restoration efforts.

Quick facts

The San Francisco Bay

► *Providing more than 4 million jobs in California, the economy surrounding the San Francisco Bay and its estuary exceeds \$175 billion.²⁹*





Our great waters The Puget Sound



In Washington, a healthy Puget Sound is critical to the wildlife, local economy and residents' way of life. With beautiful shores and 35 state parks located on or near Puget Sound, the Sound provides people with a great place to swim, boat, and fish and provides critical habitat for wildlife, including salmon and orca populations. Along with the economic benefit of tourism, the fishing industry generates \$3.2 billion for the local economy as well.³² Both of these industries are heavily dependent on the health of the Sound and the restoration of the ecosystem.

Endangered species

The waters and surrounding communities of Puget Sound are threatened by reckless development, highly toxic chemicals and oil spills. This pollution is dramatically affecting aquatic life and water quality. High levels of nutrients from agricultural and stormwater runoff are creating dead zones in the Sound where nothing can survive. The pollution contributes to the alarming decline of orca and salmon populations. Orcas were recently added to the endangered species list.³³ Pollution can also carry bacteria and viruses onto the beaches of the Sound, affecting the safety of swimmers and beachgoers.³⁴ Current legal protections are inadequate for the amount of pollution entering the Sound, and restoration efforts currently in place are underfunded and underdeveloped.

Restore the Sound

To protect the health of the Sound, restoration efforts must aim to reduce the pollution and increase restoration efforts. To put an end to the dead zones in the Sound, runoff pollution needs to be significantly reduced. The dumping of toxic chemicals needs to be monitored and extremely limited to ensure the survival of the orca and salmon. Old projects need to be revived and new efforts need to be established to create a comprehensive restoration plan with proper oversight and management.

Recovery Act

S.2739 & H.R. 4029: The Puget Sound Recovery Act of 2009 (S. 2739, H.R. 4029) was introduced in the Senate by Sens. Patty Murray (WA) and Maria Cantwell (WA) and in the House by Rep. Norm Dicks (WA). The bill will set up new infrastructure and funding to implement conservation and management plans. These plans will address stormwater and sewage discharges into the Puget Sound watershed and give special emphasis to protecting endangered species like the orca and salmon. The bill also requires plans to research, collect and make available information regarding the health of the Sound and the progress of restoration efforts.

Quick facts

The Puget Sound

► *Nearly 80 percent of Washington's revenues from tourism and travel and 75 percent of state tourism-related jobs are created in the Puget Sound region.³¹*



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