

Less Shelter from the Storm

**Environment Ohio's Analysis of How Federal Budget Proposals put Ohio at Risk
Wednesday, September 20, 2017**

With recent massive hurricanes pummeling our coasts, we need to do more to protect our communities. We need to make them less susceptible to flooding, sewage overflows and leaks from toxic waste sites, and, of course, we need to prevent even more intense global warming fueled extreme weather in the future. Unfortunately, as detailed below, pending budget proposals from the Trump administration and Congress threaten key programs that protect our communities. Rather than protecting our most vulnerable communities, budget proposals on the table in Washington, D.C. right now would threaten coastal resiliency, remove protections for flood-absorbing wetlands, neglect funding for stormwater and sewage treatment, and expose more Americans to toxic chemicals. While we do everything in our power to cut the pollution that will fuel even more extreme weather in the future, we need a budget that supports programs that can shelter us from the coming storms.

Environment Ohio analyzed the FY 2018 budget proposed by President Trump in the spring of 2017 and the current House appropriations bills for how they would affect programs that protect communities from storm-related impacts. Overall, the Trump administration proposes a 31% (\$2.6 billion) budget decrease for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). To date, the House has also proposed steep cuts to the EPA, but of \$528 million.

The EPA is the primary agency for protecting the air we breathe and the water we drink, and reducing our exposure to toxic chemicals. The EPA conducts important efforts to clean up pollution hotspots. For the Great Lakes, these restoration projects are important because healthier waterways are more able to serve as natural flood barriers and keep citizens safe from harmful pollution. Furthermore, the EPA is responsible for holding polluters accountable. The Trump administration and House's proposed cuts to the EPA budget put these and other critical functions in danger. In fact, the Trump administration's budget proposal would eliminate funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, and other budget cuts in both the Trump administration and House proposals would threaten Ohio's coastal resilience and the future health of communities on the Great Lakes¹.

The Trump administration's budget also proposed eliminating or cutting coastal protections, neglecting important clean water programs, and cutting toxic waste cleanup programs. The House spending bills also include several harmful legislative "riders," including one that targets the Clean Water Rule, which protects flood-absorbing wetlands. The House bill also cuts important coastal protection programs and initially slashed clean water grants to states. Environment Ohio is calling on Senators Brown and Portman to protect Ohioans by fully funding

¹http://environmentamericacenter.org/sites/environment/files/reports/Environment%20America%20-%20Rough%20Waters%20Ahead%20-%20Great%20Lakes%20web_0.pdf

important programs that give Ohioans shelter from the storm and by opposing these and any other harmful proposals.

Protect Flood-Absorbing Wetlands

Floods are the most common natural disaster in the US, and scientists predict that the damage caused by floods will only increase in the years to come, to over \$1 trillion per year globally by 2050². As climate change continues to progress, extreme rain events that trigger flooding are likely to become increasingly frequent. In a warming world where extreme precipitation events will be more common, we need to protect critical natural flood barriers so that communities are safer from flooding and extreme precipitation events.

Wetlands are Nature's Flood Control, but the Budget Threatens their Protection

During times of heavy precipitation, wetlands act like a sponge to slow the velocity of runoff and retain excess water. In fact, an acre of wetland 1 foot deep can hold 330,000 gallons of water. In this way, wetlands reduce the danger of flooding and mitigate its worst impacts, providing water flow regulation services to communities across the US.

Wetlands in Ohio cover about 483,000 acres, providing important natural flood protections across the state³. Unfortunately, earlier this year, the Rover Pipeline spilled about 2 million gallons of drilling fluid into Ohio wetlands in Stark County, posing a threat to wildlife, fish, and invertebrates⁴. Wetlands protect our communities from flooding, so polluting, paving over, or otherwise destroying wetlands reduces the ability of a landscape to absorb rainfall from extreme precipitation events. Furthermore, with an incident like the Rover Pipeline spill, the EPA is the agency responsible for penalizing the company that spilled and enforcing environmental standards. That important task will only become more difficult if the House and Administration succeed in cutting EPA's budget.

Wetlands are important natural flood barriers, and millions of acres of wetlands are protected by the Clean Water Rule, which restored full protections to thousands of wetlands and streams across the country. However, the Trump administration and some in Congress want to repeal the Clean Water Rule, which, in addition to protecting critical wetlands, protects the drinking water of one in three Americans, including 5.3 million Ohioans⁵. Now, the House budget bill has provisions that would cut the public out of the repeal process, making it easier for President Trump to dismantle this important protection.

² Stephane Hallegatte et al, "Future Flood Losses in Major Coastal Cities," Nature Climate Change, doi: 10/1038/NCLIMATE1979, 18 August 2013.

³ https://water.usgs.gov/nwsum/WSP2425/state_highlights_summary.html

⁴ <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/ohio/articles/2017-04-20/pipeline-firm-cited-for-2m-gallon-spill-of-drilling-mud>

⁵ https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-04/documents/wetlands_science_surface_drinking_water_surface_drinking_water_results_county.pdf

We should be doing everything we can to protect our wetlands, nature's best defense against flooding, but the current administration and the House budget bill would derail clean water protections and leave critical wetland ecosystems more vulnerable to pollution and degradation. We shouldn't be reducing the number of wetlands protected by our nation's bedrock environmental laws. Instead, we need to protect wetlands and protect our communities from flooding and extreme weather.

Make Our Shores More Resilient

As the climate changes, our shoreline communities here on Lake Erie in Ohio will face more extreme weather events. We need to help communities adapt to these coming changes by funding resiliency programs and making sure we have the best information on weather patterns and possible threats.

With recent storms showing the importance of protecting and creating more resilient shores, it's disappointing to see budget proposals from the Trump administration and Congress that threaten Lake Erie communities.

As our climate changes, our shoreline communities will need to adapt to more intense storms and changing ecosystems, and state governments need to help coordinate their response. That's why Coastal Zone Management Grants are so important--they provide a vital source of funding for states who are working with communities to protect their coasts, shorelines, and beaches. President Trump's budget would eliminate this funding, reducing the money states have to respond to communities' needs.

In Ohio, NOAA recommended \$1.83 million in Coastal Zone Management Grants to support the state's shoreline management in 2017⁶. President Trump's budget eliminated this program⁷, and the House budget proposes to cut the Coastal Zone Management grants program from \$70 million to \$45 million--a 35% cut.⁸

Research to help us prepare

As weather patterns and sea levels change, it will be more important than ever to have our best minds working to understand and document new changes so that policy makers and local communities can get the information they need to protect themselves.

That's why it's so troubling that President Trump's budget proposes a \$139 million cut to NOAA's Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research. This office is responsible for financing cutting edge research into our changing climate through its competitively funded climate research, which works with universities, labs, and institutes to better understand our climate. The Trump administration would cut this program by \$31 million. The office also oversees

⁶ <https://coast.noaa.gov/czm/media/fy17-funding-guidance.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/alison-chase/trump-budget-slashes-coastal-and-ocean-funding>

⁸ <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/alison-chase/next-steps-our-ocean-budget>

NOAA's weather and air chemistry research, leaving us less prepared to predict the weather and the aftereffects of air pollution.⁹

Under President Trump's budget, the federal Sea Grant program, which provides support to oceanic research institutes and ocean departments at partner universities that work to better understand our oceans and better manage our coastal resources, would be eliminated. This would halt the critical research into coastal resilience and our changing oceans conducted by these universities and institutes that will make sure we have the best tools to protect our communities from the changing climate.

In Ohio alone, \$1.1 million will be cut from the Sea Grant program. This is money that has gone toward protecting Lake Erie from toxic algal blooms that are threatening not only the beautiful Ohio coastline, but the Great Lakes as a whole. Sea Grants also support state green infrastructure and wetland protections. We need these grant programs to protect our shores going forward, but the budget proposals in D.C. right now would cut or eliminate this funding.

Improve and Repair our Wastewater and Sewage Infrastructure

The Budget Proposals Mean More Sewage Overflows and Runoff Pollution

The Clean Water State Revolving Fund helps prevent sewage overflows and runoff pollution, both of which are exacerbated by heavy storms and rains. Adequate wastewater infrastructure plays a vital role in the health of streams, rivers, and lakes, where discharged wastewater and stormwater often end up. Wastewater infrastructure must also become more resilient to the impacts of climate change, including sea level rise, stronger and more frequent storms, flooding, and drought.

In the aftermath of Harvey, we are already seeing reports of sewage contamination in the water flooding citizen's homes. People are getting sick, and it's because our wastewater and sewage infrastructure wasn't ready.¹⁰ These recent developments in Houston make it clear: We need programs like the Clean Water State Revolving Fund to be fully funded so that Ohio can prepare for the storms to come.

The Clean Water State Revolving Fund is a program that helps reduce flood damage risks and improve wastewater infrastructure in the face of extreme weather events. Since its inception in 1987, the Clean Water State Revolving Fund has provided more than \$111 billion in low-interest loans and subsidies. In 2016 alone, Ohio received \$75.2 million through this program to repair and upgrade wastewater systems, manage contaminated urban runoff, and upgrade treatment facilities. The program provides affordable financing to thousands of communities to upgrade and repair wastewater treatment plants, correct combined and sanitary sewer overflows, and protect waterbodies from nonpoint sources of pollution at a much lower cost than possible through conventional financing.

⁹ http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/nbo/fy18_bluebook/FY18-BlueBook.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/11/health/houston-flood-contamination.html?_r=1

Unfortunately, this program is historically underfunded. We are already facing a maintenance backlog in our wastewater systems, and this problem will only become more pressing. An EPA survey estimated that \$271 billion is needed over the next 20 years to maintain and improve the nation's wastewater infrastructure, including pipes that carry wastewater to treatment plants, the technology that treats the water, and methods for managing stormwater runoff.¹¹ Most of that \$271 billion investment is needed for projects in the next 5 years.

However, despite the desperate need across the country for these critical repairs and upgrades, the Trump administration keeps the program funded at current inadequate levels and the initial House budget actually proposed cutting funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund by \$250 million. This cut was later reversed by an amendment on the House floor, but even level funding isn't enough given the existing backlog. We need more money for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund so that Ohio can ready its wastewater infrastructure for more extreme weather events in the future.

Instead of shortchanging a program that helps states and communities protect their waterways and become more resilient to the impacts of climate change, we should have a budget that protects and expands the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, providing funds for communities to build up their resilience.

Keep Us Safe from Toxic Wastes

The Superfund program was established in the 1980's by the EPA in the aftermath of several environmental crises such as the Love Canal disaster in New York that forced hundreds of people to relocate from exposure to dangerous chemical pollution. The Superfund program is currently tasked with cleaning up more than 1,300 of the most toxic wastes sites¹² in the country and responding to environmental catastrophes and natural disasters.

One in four Americans, including over ten million children, live within three miles of a Superfund site¹³. In Ohio, there are 53 Superfund sites that are registered on the National Priority List and warrant further investigation and long-term cleanup¹⁴.

The Superfund program facilitates natural disaster response in two ways: First, the Superfund program provides training for thousands of first responders (firefighters, police, emergency room nurses, etc.) so they can protect the public and themselves by detecting and identifying hazardous substances. This training is an essential element of emergency and disaster response capabilities. Second, the Superfund program provides the expertise and financial resources to conduct emergency and long-term response actions that protect the public from

¹¹<https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-survey-shows-271-billion-needed-nations-wastewater-infrastructure>

¹² <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/national-priorities-list-npl-sites-state>

¹³ <http://www.uspirg.org/reports/usp/empty-pockets>

¹⁴ <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/search-superfund-sites-where-you-live#npl>

hazardous substances. Since the program was founded, over 394 sites have been cleaned up and delisted¹⁵.

A 2012 EPA assessment found that more than 500 Superfund sites were located in flood zones, 50 of which were based in coastal areas susceptible to sea level rise¹⁶. In the last month, Hurricane Harvey flooded 13 Superfund sites¹⁷ and left citizens in Houston wading through toxic water. With climate change expected to intensify storms like Hurricane Harvey in the future, reinforcing the Superfund program will become more critical than ever to keep our communities safe from harmful toxins. Unfortunately, The Trump administration has proposed to cut the Superfund program by \$330 million, nearly 30% of its previous budget.¹⁸ (The House has proposed to increase the level of funding for the Superfund program as a whole by \$27.6 million.) The bigger issue is that “polluter pays” fees levied on industries and chemicals that contribute to Superfund sites expired in 1995, leaving the program without a dedicated source of funding. Consequently, financial reserves in the Superfund trust have declined from a surplus of \$3.8 billion in 1996 to levels that approach or reach zero at the end of each fiscal year, forcing average American taxpayers to shoulder more of the cost for toxic waste cleanups. In addition, Superfund’s financial demands have outstripped federal appropriations, leading to program funding shortfalls that slow or stop site cleanups and hinder EPA’s ability to address the backlog of contaminated sites.

Now, more than ever, is it essential that we fully fund toxic waste cleanups, and reinstate the “polluter pays” fee, not slash the Superfund budget. Reduced funding levels for the Superfund program have already prompted the EPA to delay approximately one-third of new projects that were scheduled.¹⁹ Funding cuts from the Trump administration would further backlog the cleanup of these sites, posing a significant risk to to our families’ health.

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¹⁵ <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/deleted-national-priorities-list-npl-sites-state>

¹⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2017/09/09/us/ap-us-hurricane-irma-toxic-sites.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/status-superfund-sites-areas-affected-harvey>

¹⁸ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BUDGET-2018-MSV/pdf/BUDGET-2018-MSV.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-812>