

# FACTSHEET FOR LEGISLATORS

## Renewed Funding for Clean Lakes

### **Introduction**

- The Clean Lakes Program was created in 1972 and was established under Section 314 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, later known as the Clean Water Act. The Clean Lakes Program grant provided funds to help conduct identification surveys and diagnostic feasibility studies so that lake managers could identify issues in the lake and watershed and address them in later phases of the project.<sup>1</sup>
- Section 314 propagated funds to the Clean Lake Program specifically for lake classification surveys, diagnostic feasibility studies, and lake remediation projects. Between 1976 and 1995, the Clean Lakes Program awarded approximately \$145 million in grants; however, the program has not received any funding since 1995.

### **The Issue**

- Across the country, 45% of lakes were found to be in poor condition with elevated phosphorus, and 46% were in poor condition with high nitrogen levels.<sup>2</sup>
- Hypereutrophic conditions, typically characterized by excess nutrients, high levels of algae growth, and low transparency, were observed in 24% of lakes.<sup>2</sup>
- The algal toxins known as microcystins, which are harmful to humans and pets, were detected in 21% of lakes.<sup>2</sup>
- Based on benthic macroinvertebrates, 24% of American lakes were in poor condition.
- The 314 Clean Lakes program funding was discontinued and reallocated to Section 319 of the Clean Water Act, which provides funds for implementing projects that address non-point source water pollution. However, the Congress Committee on Appropriations recommended only five percent of 319 grant funds were used to facilitate lake-related projects compared to other water sources contaminated by non-point sources.<sup>3</sup>
- Section 319 funds are not properly allocated to restoration projects that deal with the most current and specific lake-related issues that involve climate change, harmful algal blooms, and nutrient pollution.

### **Economic Impacts:**

- Restoring funding to Section 314 of the Clean Water Act and using these funds to strengthen the Clean Lakes Program is an investment that will lead to a great return on recreation and tourism of clean and healthy lakes.
- According to the EPA report on the economic benefits of the Clean Lakes Program, the grant program spent approximately \$9,414,622 and achieved \$90,777,300 in return on investment. The benefits from the Clean Lakes Program range in various categories, including recreation, aesthetics, flood control, economic development, fish/wildlife, agriculture, property value, public health, and water supply. Financial returns are expected to be even higher today, as harmful algal blooms have increasingly disrupted local businesses and recreation.<sup>4</sup>
- Lakes provide natural ecosystem services such as water filtration, storage, nutrient cycling, soil formation, recreation, food, and timber. Many of these services are costly to engineer and replace; thus, it is economically beneficial to allocate funds toward the front-end protection of lakes by preventing their impairments.<sup>5</sup>
- Clean waterfronts for homes and businesses help to increase property values and raise revenues by attracting more individuals to an area.<sup>6</sup> Local communities are increasingly aware of the potential repercussions of declining property values.
- One study found that 75% of the 113 lakes they studied those with excess levels of phosphorus and also experienced a 0.4%-3.3% increase in housing prices.<sup>6</sup> Researchers found that properties surrounding lakes with high levels of microcystin, an algal toxin, experienced a 2-17% decline in property value.<sup>7</sup>

### **Policy Recommendations**

- NALMS recommends that Congress reauthorize funding for Section 314 and increase the annual appropriations.
- NALMS recommends an enhanced Clean Lakes Program that will prioritize high-quality lakes with cultural value and as lakes in communities with environmental justice concerns.

### **References**

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