

Joe Robison Testimony on H.R. 7975, Great Lakes Restoration Semipostal Stamp Act

United States House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife

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Testimony provided by Joe Robison, Southeastern Regional Supervisor - Wildlife Division, Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee,

I want to thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on H.R. 7975, the Great Lakes Restoration Semipostal Stamp Act. My name is Joe Robison, and I am the Southeastern Regional Supervisor for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Division. In this role, I supervise 17 counties in Southeast Michigan. I oversee and help manage over 200,000 acres of State land in this region to benefit wildlife, habitat, and people. I am here to testify in support of H.R. 7975, which directs the United States Postal Service to issue a Great Lakes-themed semipostal stamp for citizens to voluntarily purchase to generate additional funds for the highly successful and wildly popular Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI).

As a lifelong hunter and angler, who has dedicated his life to conserving the region's natural resources, I have seen firsthand the significance of the investments made by the GLRI since its inception in 2010. And while the U.S. Congress has shown strong support year after year for this program by appropriating dollars at a robust level, creating an additional funding mechanism to supplement the annual appropriations process with the creation of this specialty stamp would not only increase dollars for on-the-ground conservation but also serve as a method to promote the GLRI to the broader public who directly benefit from the program's existence. To-date, the GLRI has funded over 6,000 restoration projects throughout the region, resulting in more than 460,000 acres of wildlife habitat enhancements and over 2.2 million acres of farmland receiving technical and financial assistance to implement on-farm best management practices that improve water quality and soil health. There have been many projects in my Region of the State where we have used GLRI funding along with state and private sector dollars to enhance, restore and conserve thousands of acres of coastal wetlands and prairie grass that benefit all wildlife, fish, citizens of Michigan and all the visitors that visit this great State.

The GLRI has also enhanced Michigan's ability to confront major environmental problems threatening the Great Lakes – from accelerating progress in addressing our state's fourteen Areas of Concern (AOCs), to significant initiatives to eradicate aquatic invasive species in water bodies throughout our state, and to allow extensive work to reduce nonpoint source pollution through green infrastructure projects. Thanks in large part to the contributions from GLRI, Michigan and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have completed restoration efforts at and delisted several of our AOCs since its inception: the Deer Lake and White Lake AOCs in 2014 and the Menominee River AOC in 2020. And the same goes for important fisheries work: GLRI has enabled projects like the protection of the Buffalo Reef in Lake Superior, installation of new spawning reefs in Saginaw Bay, St. Clair River, and Detroit River, and work to prevent invasive carp and other species from entering the Great Lakes.

These investments serve current generations of Americans but also help secure a healthy future for those who inherit these lands and waters from us in the years to come. I think a lot about future

generations and have invested a large part of my life mentoring kids in our time-honored outdoor traditions of hunting and fishing and teaching them about the importance of natural resources conservation and management. As today's decision-makers and natural resource stewards, we have a tremendous responsibility to set policy in-line with our values so that our region's treasured natural resources continue to produce a bountiful harvest and the full range of ecosystem services upon which we all rely.

The GLRI is the regional conservation model to which all other programs are compared. It is truly in the nation's interest to not only maintain it but to grow it so that the important on-the-ground result-oriented work can continue at an even larger scale. The way that GLRI funds are leveraged with state and private sector dollars further amplifies the impacts, and serves as an exemplary model for how conservation work is done in the United States.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee once again for the opportunity to offer my perspective and to Congressman Walberg and the 32 bipartisan cosponsors who have brought this legislation forward. In my view, there are few other issues of greater importance than the conservation of natural resources. I encourage you all to support and advance this bill.