

GREAT LAKES INDIAN FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION

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www.glifwc.org



• MEMBER TRIBES •

MICHIGAN

Bay Mills Community
Keweenaw Bay Community
Lac Vieux Desert Band

WISCONSIN

Bad River Band
Lac Courte Oreilles Band
Lac du Flambeau Band
Red Cliff Band
St. Croix Chippewa
Sokaogon Chippewa

MINNESOTA

Fond du Lac Band
Mille Lacs Band

FY 2025 TESTIMONY – BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES

JASON SCHLENDER, EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATOR

GREAT LAKES INDIAN FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION (GLIFWC)

1. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS, OPERATION OF INDIAN PROGRAMS

- a. **TRUST-NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, RIGHTS PROTECTION IMPLEMENTATION (RPI)** No less than **\$50,643,000** for FY 2025, with \$8,125,000 for Great Lakes Area Resource Management. An overall need of no less than \$66 million has been identified by the five Commissions funded within RPI, presuming historically proportionate shares for each Commission.
- b. **TRUST-NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, TRIBAL MANAGEMENT/DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (TM/DP):** At least the **\$18,696,000** proposed for FY 2025 and the TM/DP requests of GLIFWC's member tribes.
- c. **TRUST-NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, FISH/WILDLIFE/PARKS PROGRAM:** At least **\$24,019,000** the amount proposed for FY 2025.

Funding Authorizations: Snyder Act, 25 U.S.C. s. 13; Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, (P.L. 93-638), 25 U.S.C. ss. 450f and 450h; and the treaties between the United States and GLIFWC's member Ojibwe Tribes.¹

2. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

- a. **ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS AND MANAGEMENT, GEOGRAPHIC PROGRAMS, GREAT LAKES RESTORATION:** At least **\$368,000,000**, including no less than **\$20,900,000** for the Distinct Tribal Program (DTP).
- b. **STATE AND TRIBAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS, CATEGORICAL GRANTS, TRIBAL GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM:** At least \$85,009,000, the amount proposed in FY 2025.

Funding Authorizations: Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. s. 1268(c); Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, Pub. L. 114-322 s. 5005; and treaties cited above.

These programs fulfill federal treaty, trust, and contract obligations to GLIFWC's member tribes, providing vital resources to sustain their governmental programs. We ask that Congress maintain and enhance these programs.

¹ Specifically, the Treaty of 1836, 7 Stat. 491; Treaty of 1837, 7 Stat. 536; Treaty of 1842, 7 Stat. 591; and Treaty of 1854, 10 Stat. 1109. The rights guaranteed by these treaties have been affirmed by various court decisions, including a 1999 US Supreme Court case.

GLIFWC's FY 2025 FUNDING REQUEST HIGHLIGHTS

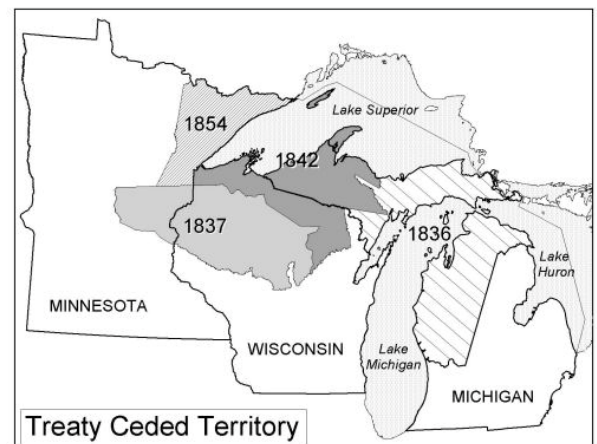
1. Should Congress provide an increase to the RPI line item, GLIFWC will use its share to address salary disparities between its staff and their colleagues at state and federal agencies -- \$300,000 of that increase would be used specifically to address the 44% vacancy rate in the Commission's warden force. While GLIFWC was able to use its FY 2023 increase to adjust its pay scale, years of Continuing Resolutions have led to a recruitment and retention problem in GLIFWC's warden force, primarily based on salary disparities with other similar agencies. GLIFWC's next funding priority with its proportionate share of the remaining RPI increase will be to compensate all its employees at rates similar to their state and federal counterparts, a situation that is similarly hindering its ability to attract candidates for open positions. Annual RPI increases are needed to keep pace with the federal scale so that no such shortfall occurs again.
2. Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding of no less than \$368,000,000, as proposed in FY 2025, with an increase to the Distinct Tribal Program (DTP) to at least \$20,900,000.
3. Full funding for contract support costs, as required by the ISDEA Act.
4. Sufficient funding in the Tribal Management and Development line item for GLIFWC's member tribes to fulfill their needs for reservation-based natural resource programs and to fund the Circle of Flight wetlands program.

GLIFWC's GOAL – A SECURE FUNDING BASE TO FULFILL TREATY PURPOSES AND LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

For over 35 years, Congress has funded GLIFWC to implement comprehensive conservation, natural resource protection, and law enforcement programs that: 1) ensure member tribes are able to implement their treaty reserved rights to hunt, fish, and gather throughout the ceded territories; 2) ensure a healthy and sustainable natural resource base to support those rights; 3) protect public safety; and 4) promote healthy, safe communities. These programs also provide a wide range of public benefits, and facilitate participation in management partnerships in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota.

GLIFWC's PROGRAMS – PROMOTING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES AND EDUCATING TRIBAL MEMBERS THROUGH TREATY RIGHTS EXERCISE

Established in 1984, GLIFWC is a natural resources management agency of eleven member Ojibwe Tribes with resource management responsibilities over their ceded territory (off-reservation) hunting, fishing, and gathering treaty rights. These ceded territories extend over a 60,000 square mile area in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan.² GLIFWC employs over 80 full-time staff, including natural resource scientists, technicians, conservation enforcement officers, policy specialists, and



² GLIFWC's programs do not duplicate those of the Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority or the 1854 Treaty Authority. GLIFWC also coordinates with its member tribes with respect to tribal treaty fishing that extends beyond reservation boundaries by virtue of the Treaty of 1854 and the reservations' locations on Lake Superior.

public information specialists.

GLIFWC strives to implement its programs in a holistic, integrated manner consistent with the culture and values of its member tribes, especially in light of tribal lifeways that the exercise of treaty rights supports. This means not only ensuring that tribal members can legally exercise their rights but supporting community efforts to educate them about the benefits (physical, spiritual, and cultural) of harvesting and consuming a more traditional diet, as well as promoting inter-generational learning and the transmission of traditional cultural and management practices.

GLIFWC and its member tribes thank Congress, and particularly this Subcommittee, for its continuing support of these treaty obligations and its recognition of the ongoing success of these programs. GLIFWC's FY 2025 funding request includes two main elements:

1. BIA RIGHTS PROTECTION IMPLEMENTATION/GREAT LAKES AREA MANAGEMENT (WITHIN THE RPI LINE ITEM):

No less than **\$50,643,000**. The five treaty commissions have estimated the cost of full implementation of the court orders governing their treaty-reserved rights at, collectively, no less than \$66,000,000. The recent increases to RPI are greatly appreciated, but many years of Continuing Resolutions has led to shortfalls that are self-perpetuating without a proactive approach. With the FY 2023 increase, GLIFWC was able to adjust its pay to the FY 2023 pay scale. However, the funding discrepancy is still significant. GLIFWC estimates that it would need an increase of at least \$963,000 to fully adjust its compensation structure.

Appropriating through Continuing Resolutions has not allowed the RPI line item to keep up with inflation and cost-of-living increases. This shortfall is most acutely felt in GLIFWC's warden force. To highlight the significance of this shortfall, GLIFWC's warden force has a 44% vacancy rate. GLIFWC provides conservation officers that enforce tribal conservation codes and who work with local authorities when they detect violations of state or federal criminal and conservation codes. These officers also play a significant role in educating tribal youth, including teaching hunter safety classes, cultural practices, and harvesting regulations; they provide tribal youth meaningful, healthy, and safe ways to engage in outdoor activities; and they build trust between communities and law enforcement. While recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers is difficult nationwide, the stagnation of RPI funding has made it impossible for GLIFWC to compete with state and federal counterparts; no amount of creative thinking has made up for the difference in wages. Beginning GLIFWC field wardens make an average of \$6,000 less than those employed by MI, WI, and MN, and by the time they reach seven years at their respective agencies, GLIFWC wardens will make, on average, \$31,670 less than their colleagues with the same experience in MI; \$34,660 less than those in WI; and \$49,758 less than those in MN.

These warden vacancies make meeting the treaty obligations to monitor treaty harvest more burdensome and are a blow to partnering jurisdictions. GLIFWC's wardens are often called upon to assist other jurisdictions in emergency situations, particularly in the more rural areas of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. In 2023, GLIFWC wardens responded to over 170 calls for assistance, for which they have received numerous acknowledgements. The Upper Peninsula of Michigan is currently without a stationed GLIFWC warden and relies on coverage from wardens that may be stationed many hours away. Seasonal harvesting activities, such as spring spearing, require wardens to travel to lakes located in areas with warden vacancies, and create added costs in travel and lodging for the duration of the season. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle of burnout

and makes it increasingly difficult to hire new wardens as senior officers retire.

There is a long history of federal funding for treaty rights protection and implementation programs. By now, this Subcommittee is aware of GLIFWC's holistic approach to protecting and supporting treaty rights and the natural resources that support them. We have always enjoyed and appreciated the Subcommittee's ongoing support for GLIFWC, its member tribes, and its programs. We urge the Subcommittee to support increases to the RPI line item that allow the Commission's work to continue unabated.

2. EPA GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE: \$368,000. DISTINCT TRIBAL PROGRAM (DTP): \$20,900,000.

GLIFWC supports continued funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) as an important non-regulatory program that enhances and ensures coordinated governance in the Great Lakes, fulfillment of international agreements, and substantive natural resource protection and restoration projects. GLIFWC supports the continuation of GLRI funding at no less than \$368,000,000 proposed in FY 2025.

RESULTS AND BENEFITS OF GLIFWC'S PROGRAMS

- 1. MAINTAIN THE REQUISITE CAPABILITY TO MEET LEGAL OBLIGATIONS, TO CONSERVE NATURAL RESOURCES, AND TO REGULATE TREATY HARVESTS:** At its most basic level, GLIFWC's programs support tribal compliance with court decrees and intergovernmental agreements that govern the tribes' treaty-reserved rights. Funding for science and research enhances GLIFWC's ability to address ecosystem threats that harm treaty natural resources, including those related to climate change.
- 2. REMAIN A TRUSTED MANAGEMENT AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNER, AND SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTOR IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION:** GLIFWC has become a respected and integral part of management and law enforcement partnerships that conserve natural resources and protect public safety. It brings a tribal perspective to interjurisdictional Great Lakes management forums and would use its scientific expertise to study issues and geographic areas that are important to its member tribes but that others may not be examining.
- 3. MAINTAIN THE OVERALL PUBLIC BENEFITS THAT DERIVE FROM ITS PROGRAMS:** Over the years, GLIFWC has become a recognized and valued partner in natural resource management. Because of its institutional experience and staff expertise, GLIFWC has built and maintained numerous partnerships that: i) provide accurate information and data to counter social misconceptions about tribal treaty harvests and the status of ceded territory natural resources; ii) maximize each partner's financial resources and avoid duplication of effort and costs; iii) engender cooperation rather than competition; and iv) undertake projects that achieve public benefits that no one partner could accomplish alone.
- 4. ENCOURAGE AND CONTRIBUTE TO HEALTHY TRIBAL COMMUNITIES.** GLIFWC works with its member tribes' communities to promote the benefits of treaty rights exercise. These include the health benefits associated with a more traditional diet and the intergenerational learning that takes place when elders teach youth. In addition, GLIFWC sponsors a camp each summer where tribal youth build leadership skills, strengthen connections to the outdoors, and learn about treaty rights and careers in natural resource fields.