

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 20, 2024

The Honorable Debra Shore
Regional Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 5
77 W. Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Regional Administrator Shore:

We are writing to urge you in your capacity as Great Lakes National Program Manager to immediately allocate funds under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to begin the process of characterizing contaminated sediment in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS).

The CAWS is a vital part of the Great Lakes ecosystem. The more than 100-mile network of rivers, canals, and locks in Chicago and Northwest Indiana provides a navigation connection between the Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi River. Contaminated sediment within the CAWS is negatively impacting our constituents, fish, wildlife, development, recreation, and many other ecosystem services throughout the Chicago metro region.

For more than 100 years, the CAWS has suffered from pollution; specifically, the south fork of the south bend of the Chicago River, known as Bubbly Creek. This area's name comes from the bubbles generated from sanitary sewage, industrial waste, and animal waste that were disposed of in the creek for more than 100 years from the adjacent Union Stockyards and other local industries. While the stockyards no longer line this portion of the river banks, the sediment remains highly contaminated, preventing the CAWS' ecosystem from being restored.

For the past two decades, members of the Illinois Congressional delegation have worked to restore the CAWS' ecosystem and address these contamination issues. Despite disputes about liability that have slowed cleanup efforts, we remain committed to addressing the contamination in the CAWS. The *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024* (P.L. 118-42) included the following report language: "The Committee encourages Agency funds for Great Lakes projects to be made available for projects in the historic Great Lakes Basin, which includes the Chicago River Watershed."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can begin to address contamination in the CAWS using GLRI funds, but a long-term solution to clean up the area and restore the ecosystem will require a partnership between EPA, the Army Corps of Engineers, and local partners, including the City of Chicago. The *Great Lakes Legacy Act* (P.L. 107-303), now part of the GLRI, was established to address contaminated sediment attributable to historical sources using an important cost-share system to allow municipalities, states, tribes, local water resource agencies, businesses, and the federal government to share in bearing the cost. We encourage EPA to implement this model as it begins to address pollution in the CAWS.

Using the GLRI to invest in CAWS remediation will not distract from other important investments in the region. Sediment contamination characterization can begin on areas of the CAWS such as Bubbly Creek, the North Branch, North Shore Channel, Collateral Channel, or other segments of the South Branch, Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, Little Calumet River or Cal-Sag Channel at modest expense. Initiating this effort by the end of 2024 would allow adequate time for EPA to plan for expanded CAWS efforts in the coming years.

The Chicago Area Waterway System has suffered from pollution and neglect for the last century. Thank you for your efforts in addressing this issue and creating a new legacy for the region. We look forward to continuing to partner with EPA and other federal, state, and local agencies to deliver a cleaner waterway for the community.

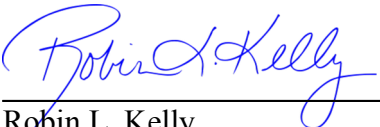
Sincerely,



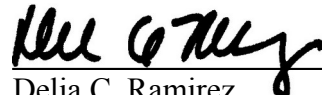
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



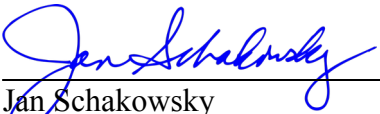
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



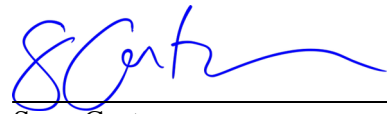
Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress



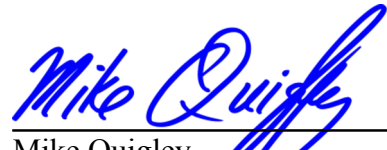
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



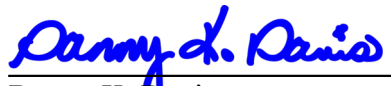
Sean Casten
Member of Congress




Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress