



Bill would update Environmental Sensitivity Index maps for Great Lakes



Dave Joyce

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U.S. Rep. Dave Joyce, R-Russell Township, is co-sponsoring a bipartisan bill that would prioritize and update federal mapping of the Great Lakes.

The **Environmental Sensitivity Index** maps, which are maintained by the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**, have not been updated in more than two decades in some cases.

“The Great Lakes generate billions of dollars in economic activity and provide drinking water for over 40 million people,” said Rep. Dan Kildee, Michigan Democrat and the bill’s main sponsor. “We must do everything we can to protect them from harm. If an oil spill or natural disaster occurs on the Great Lakes, we need to have up-to-date maps and information in order to respond quickly and effectively.”

ESI maps provide detailed guides, highlighting “vulnerable locations, structures and natural resources near the lakeshore” according to Kildee’s office. The maps are used in emergencies to respond to and protect habitat, species and structures that are “most likely to be impacted by a potential oil spill or other major disaster.”

Joyce said the maps serve as a “critical resource to assess potential risks to the lakes.”

According to Kildee’s office, the legislation dubbed the “Great Lakes Environmental Sensitivity Index Act of 2017” would direct the NOAA Office of Response and Restoration researchers to update the maps for each coastal area of the Great Lakes. The office would work with state and other federal agencies on the updates.

Under the proposed bill the maps are required to be updated every seven years.

Joyce called the more than 20-year stretch without updates “simply unacceptable.”

“Legislation like this will help preserve and protect the Great Lakes, which are truly a national treasure,” he said.

Two other Michigan legislators — Democrat Debbie Dingell and Republican Bill Huizenga — are co-sponsoring the House bill. Sens. Gary Peters, also a Michigan Democrat, and Todd Young, an Indiana Republican, have introduced a companion version of the legislation in the Senate.

According to the **Congressional Budget Office**, the bill would cost \$7.5 million over a four-year period from 2018 to 2022 if passed.

The legislation has support from groups such as the Alliance for the Great Lakes, the National Wildlife Federation and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

“Mapping our most sensitive biological resources is critical to protecting our Great Lakes wildlife and their habitats in the event of an oil spill, especially for threatened and endangered species and spawning beds for anadromous sport fish like steelhead,” said Mike Shriberg, Great Lakes regional executive director for the National Wildlife Federation.

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