

Congress approves \$475M to restore the Great Lakes **Deb Price / Detroit News Washington Bureau**

Washington -- Congress approved legislation Thursday that includes \$475 million to restore the Great Lakes by combatting invasive species, cleaning up highly polluted sites and expanding wetlands.

President Barack Obama has signaled he'll sign it.

The House passed the bill 247-178, and the Senate later passed it 72-28.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative includes:

- \$146 million for cleaning up pollution in sediment in feeder rivers and harbors before it flows into the Lakes.
- \$105 million to protect and restore habitat and wildlife.
- \$97 million to stop "nonpoint" pollution, such as farm fertilizer and oil runoff, that closes beaches and leads to fish kills.
- \$65 million to evaluate how the Lakes and wildlife are responding to cleanup efforts.
- \$60 million for combating zebra mussels and other invasive species.

"This is a good day for the Great Lakes," said Rep. Sander Levin, D-Royal Oak.

The Great Lakes funding is in an Interior appropriations bill, which also temporarily funds several agencies to avoid a shutdown.

Michigan's eight Democrats in the House voted for the bill, joined by Rep. Candice Miller, R-Harrison Township.

The state's other six Republicans voted against it.

In the Senate, Carl Levin, D-Detroit, and Debbie Stabenow, D-Lansing, voted for the bill.

Rep. Vern Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids, said he reluctantly voted against a bill containing Great Lakes money because he objected to the overall size -- \$32.2 billion -- for Interior programs.

"The 17 percent spending increase (for Interior) ...is far too high," he said.

The bill also includes \$500,000 to help repair a 21-mile line that transports sewage from 300,000 residents of Oakland and Macomb counties to Detroit for treatment.

The bill also exempts 26 Great Lakes steam and diesel cargo vessels from proposed tough clean-air rules by the Environmental Protection Agency. Great Lakes steam ships will be exempt, while diesel vessels can apply for a waiver.

Miller said the EPA rule threatened to "ground this important part of our economy to a halt."