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June 3, 2011

Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy
Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310-0108

Dear Assistant Secretary Darcy:

I write to urge you to reallocate any remaining FY11 Aquatic Plant Control Program funds and assign them to the Aquatic Plant Control project in Chautauqua Lake. It is essential that this project moves forward so that Chautauqua Lake has the tools and a long-term strategy needed to eradicate Eurasian milfoil, the invasive vegetation plaguing Chautauqua Lake's economic and ecological health.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Pittsburgh District is currently conducting an investigation into the ultimate control and eradication of Eurasian milfoil by biological, chemical and mechanical means. The first two steps of the project, the Initial Appraisal and the Reconnaissance Phase, in the four-step Aquatic Plant Control (APC) program have been completed. Chautauqua County, the local sponsor, has been working closely with the Pittsburgh ACOE to develop a cost-sharing agreement to undertake a NEPA compliant Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Feasibility Study. However, in order to move forward with finalizing the cost-share and onto the next step of the project, the Feasibility Phase, an additional \$150,000 in federal funding is needed. While I understand the current budgetary environment has required difficult choices, the proposed elimination of the APC program in FY12 will have an enormously negative impact on Chautauqua Lake.

Chautauqua Lake is the main driver of economic development in Chautauqua County and brings in a significant amount of out-of-state money through vacationers, second-home sales and recreational sportsmen. Of the \$140 million in tourist income that comes into the county, \$70 million comes from activities directly related to Chautauqua Lake and the 5 lake towns that constitute 40% of total property value in Chautauqua County.

Eurasian milfoil negatively affects recreational, aesthetic and the overall health of this aquatic ecosystem. The rapidly growing weed forms a canopy that shades and limits lower growing beneficial native plant species important to the ecology of Chautauqua Lake threatening the vitality of the lake. The thick growth and noxious odors of the weed also wreak havoc on

recreational boaters, swimmers and waterfront residents in several areas of the lake, making it difficult to fish, swim and navigate through the water, and altogether blocking lake front access in many locations. Additionally, this blockage as well as the unsightly and odorous nature of the weed negatively affects property values of homes sitting on the lake.

County and local governments have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to implement mechanical and chemical controls in the past, but these methods are of limited effectiveness and have only provide control of Eurasian milfoil growth in the short-term. Continued funding for this project is desperately needed to provide a long-term solution that will permanently beat back this weed so it no longer threatens the health, beauty, and economic vitality of Chautauqua Lake.

I urge you to find the means to continue funding this essential project. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "BRIAN HIGGINS". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress