



**United States Committee of Advisors
to the
Great Lakes Fishery Commission**



Resolution 25-01: A Resolution Calling for Full Support of the Great Lakes Sea Lamprey Control Program Including Full Restoration of Staff and an Exception to the Hiring Freeze in the United States to Implement the Critical Bi-National Control Program

WHEREAS the Great Lakes Fishery Commission is responsible for the implementation of the binational sea lamprey control program, essential work to maintain the integrity of the Great Lakes ecosystem;

WHEREAS the Great Lakes fishery generates \$5.1 billion (US dollars) in economic output each year and directly supports 75,000 jobs in addition to hundreds of thousands of jobs related to tourism, navigation, and more;

WHEREAS invasive sea lampreys are parasitic fish native to the Atlantic Ocean that invaded the Great Lakes in the mid-1800s and early 1900s and decimated native fish populations, such as lake trout, whitefish, ciscoes, and walleye;

WHEREAS sea lampreys feed by suctioning onto fish and drinking their blood. Each sea lamprey is capable of killing up to 40 pounds of Great Lakes fish over a 12 to 18-month parasitic feeding period;

WHEREAS at their peak populations in the mid-1900s, sea lampreys were killing 100 million pounds of Great Lakes fish each year, resulting in dramatic declines in Great Lakes fish catches, including the extirpation of native lake trout in all Great Lakes except for Lake Superior. Hundreds of thousands of jobs related to the region's economy were lost as a result;

WHEREAS coordinated binational efforts to control sea lampreys began in the 1950s and have now resulted in a 90% reduction of sea lamprey populations. Sea lamprey control primarily consists of identifying tributaries which contain larval sea lamprey and treating those streams with a selective pesticide to kill the larvae, before they migrate into the lakes to parasitize Great Lakes fish;

WHEREAS sea lamprey control is directed by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission in partnership with the agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Fisheries and Ocean Canada, with science support from the U.S. Geological Survey;

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WHEREAS The Great Lakes Fishery Commission’s sea lamprey control program is one of the most cost effective and successful invasive species suppression programs in the world and an essential component of protecting the culturally and economically-valuable Great Lakes fisheries;

WHEREAS the sea lamprey control program relies on the annual activities of permanent and non-permanent (e.g. seasonal, temporary) staff to execute essential components of the control program, including larval surveys to determine what streams require treatment, and the application of restricted use pesticides;

WHEREAS Twelve U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permanent staff—which represents approximately 14% of the permanent sea lamprey control program positions—were terminated by the USFWS on Friday February 14, 2025. These staff were in their 1-year probationary period after being hired or promoted into new positions in 2024. Many have been with the control program for years, working their way up from temporary seasonal status to their permanent positions;

WHEREAS a broad federal hiring freeze has slowed U.S Fish and Wildlife Service from hiring approximately 25 temporary seasonal staff who are necessary to deliver a full sea lamprey control program in 2025. Seasonal staff are critical to a successful field season and without these staff positions, effective sea lamprey control will not be successfully executed for the 2025 control season (scheduled to commence in April of 2025).

WHEREAS the firing of probationary staff, the announced hiring freeze, and the promised threat of further broad-based staffing reductions means the sea lamprey control program would be without at least 1/3 of the necessary workforce to carry out crucial sea lamprey control activities;

WHEREAS the noted policy changes and staffing restrictions have created uncertainty and chaos such that the advisors and the US Section are deeply concerned that the USFWS will be unable to fulfil the terms of its MOA with the GLFC, and that the delivery of a full sea lamprey control program in 2025, as funded by Congress and Parliament, is in peril;

WHEREAS if the fired probationary staff are not rehired and the hiring freeze is not lifted at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a single year of 1/3 reduced staff capacity will result in approximately 2,500,000 additional sea lamprey larvae not killed and in the Great Lakes system. These sea lampreys will in turn kill approximately 12,000,000 pounds of fish and cost the Great Lakes fishing economy approximately \$264,000,000 in lost potential. Overall, the impact will be similar to the COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions, costing thousands of jobs in communities across the Great Lakes.

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WHEREAS it is known that reducing sea lamprey control activities will rapidly and negatively impact Great Lakes fisheries. During the COVID-19 pandemic, sea lamprey control efforts were reduced by 75% in 2020 and 25% in 2021 due to travel restrictions¹. The result of this reduction of sea lamprey control meant an increase of more than 300,000 adult sea lampreys throughout the basin, capable of killing more than 12,200,000 lbs of fish species, including lake trout, Chinook salmon, coho salmon, and steelhead/rainbow trout, valued at nearly \$290,000,000 USD.

WHEREAS the control program was executed fully in 2022, and the Great Lakes fishery is just beginning to recover from the reduced treatment effort. Loss of the 2025 control season will end that recovery;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the U.S. Committee of Advisors stresses the critical need to execute the sea lamprey control program every year, at full capacity, in order to maintain the Great Lakes ecosystem, the multi-billion dollar Great Lakes fishery, and the tens of thousands of jobs it supports.

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the U.S. Committee of Advisors to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission urgently calls upon the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to work with Congress and the Administration to take all steps necessary to ensure the successful implementation of the sea lamprey control program in 2025 and beyond, including the immediate lifting of the hiring freeze, the rehiring of probationary and seasonal staff that were terminated February 14, 2025, and the establishment of assurances that no further staffing reduction requirements will be required.

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the U.S. Committee of Advisors urgently call on members of Congress to direct the Interior Secretary to direct Mr. Will Meeks, Director of Region 3 of the Fish and Wildlife Service, to hire immediately the probationary and seasonal staff necessary to implement the 2025 sea lamprey control field season. Failure to act will result in the inability to carry out sea lamprey control and will lead to significant economic loss to Americans.

THEREFORE, BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Advisors urge the US Section to assess the long-term feasibility of the current model for the delivery of sea lamprey control, including the cost effectiveness and stability of current arrangements with US delivery agents. Sea lamprey control in the Great Lakes is too important to Great Lakes health and sustainability (economically and ecologically) to permit short-sighted policy chaos to imperil the historic success of the program.

¹ Marcy-Quay, B., Lewandoski, S.A. Booth, R.M.W., Connerton, M.J., Jubar, A.K., Legard, C.D., O'Malley, B.P., Prindle, S.E., Sumner, A.W., Symbal, M.J., Todd, A., Yuille, M.J., Treska, T.J., Siefkes, M.J., & Johnson, N.S. Sea Lamprey control reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic corresponds to rapid increase in Sea Lamprey abundance. Fisheries, 2025.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/fshmag/vuaf020>

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