



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**GREAT LAKES WATER AUTHORITY CELEBRATES FIVE YEARS OF
UNPARALLELED REGIONAL COLLABORATION, SETS NATIONAL
EXAMPLE FOR UTILITY OPERATIONS**

Strong foundation of collaboration and partnership results in optimized operations, reliable delivery of water and wastewater services, and water of unquestionable quality

DETROIT— The Great Lakes Water Authority’s (GLWA) celebration of its five-year operating anniversary, which was marked on January 1, 2021, illustrates to the people of southeast Michigan an unparalleled success story of regional collaboration and the multi-level benefit that collaboration continues to provide to the nearly 4 million people in its eight-county service area. Significant progress has been achieved in all areas of the utility furthering GLWA’s commitment to protecting public health, contributing to the regional economy and being good stewards of the environment.

“I am extremely proud of what GLWA and its team members have accomplished in our first five years of serving the people of southeast Michigan,” said Sue F. McCormick, Chief Executive Officer, GLWA. “GLWA has made positive impacts on the health, safety and livelihood of our region in a fairly short timeframe. I believe that the success we have had is tangible proof that regional collaboration works; that when we come together in support of a common purpose so much can be achieved. Moving forward we will remain steadfast in our focus on partnership and leveraging the resources we’ve built over these last five years to continue to benefit the entire region for decades to come.”

Since its stand-up in January 2016, GLWA has achieved a broad cross-section of accomplishments across five key areas: partnership and collaboration, financial stewardship, environmental stewardship, innovation, and quality.

Highlights in each of the five areas are outlined below.

Partnership and Collaboration

- The first **One Water Partnership Agreement (OWPA)** was signed by GLWA and its member partners in 2017. This historic agreement outlines the mutual commitment to working together for the greater good of the region and details the responsibilities of all parties to moving the agreement forward. A critical addition to

the agreement was the development of a multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency approach to infrastructure renewal and investment;

- A direct outcome of the OWPA was the rollout of an annual **Member Partner Scorecard**, a first of its kind measurement tool used by a utility in the United States, which was derived specifically from the “voice” of the customer. The survey provides GLWA with direct feedback from its member partners, which is then used to optimize operations and service. In the most recent survey (2020), GLWA achieved a 96 percent satisfaction score, which is a nine-point increase over the previous year;
- GLWA’s board recently approved the utility’s [Wastewater Master Plan \(WWMP\)](#), a 40-year plan that is a regional roadmap to proactively and adaptively manage the wastewater system and provide a path to affordability through partnerships and collaborations. The WWMP is specifically designed to optimize the wastewater system based on need at the lowest cost for the region, as opposed to an individual system approach. It offers GLWA tremendous opportunity to leverage the infrastructure the region has invested in to date and identify future investments and improvements to continue to advance water quality in the region. The WWMP is a result of unprecedented regional collaboration among 100 stakeholders, including GLWA’s member partners, watershed advocacy groups, and regulatory agencies;
- To help close the gap in skilled technician roles and drive a diverse pipeline of highly trained, operations-focused workers into the organization and the community, GLWA has developed three **Apprenticeship Programs** in partnership with Focus: HOPE and Henry Ford College. GLWA committed to launching one new U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) apprenticeship program each year until the system’s remaining needs are met to ensure a trained and sustainable workforce and balance an aging workforce. The program successfully demonstrates a learn-while-you-earn model with on-the-job training and education at no cost to the participants. In 2020, the Authority [graduated its first cohort](#) of apprentices from its inaugural three-year Electrical Instrumentation Control Technician – Instrumentation Apprenticeship with 20 graduates, 19 of whom accepted full-time positions with GLWA. Apprenticeships for Maintenance Technicians and Electrical Instrumentation Control Technicians-Electrical are also currently underway. The Authority plans to launch a fourth USDOL apprenticeship, for Water Technicians, in 2021;

Financial Stewardship

- With a mix of diligence, discipline, and strategic timing, the GLWA team (whether through GLWA or the predecessor debt obligor DWSD) has, since 2014, executed five refunding transactions – for the water and sewer system combined – that reached the milestone of \$1 billion in debt service savings in 2020;
- These successful refundings were made possible, in part, by the steady increase in bond ratings by all three bond rating agencies, with GLWA reaching AA category status in September 2018 and receiving further incremental increases in March 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic crisis was unfolding; GLWA has overachieved on its commitment to limiting annual increases to its budgeted revenue requirement to 4

percent or less (as agreed upon in the Authority's foundational documents). In fact, the five-year average for charge adjustments for the water system is 1.9 percent and for the sewer system is 0.7 percent – both well below the above-mentioned 4 percent promise.

- An additional measure of GLWA's financial stewardship is delivering budgetary control in comparison with peer utilities. Since its inception in 2016, GLWA charge increases are less than half of that indicated for its peers in the Utility Rate Index published in 2019 by Black and Veatch. Further, GLWA charge increases are closer to inflationary indices than peer utility averages. This is notable for a highly capital- and maintenance-intensive enterprise;
- GLWA has also moved to a biennial budget that includes a five-year financial plan, which informs our 10-year financial plan. The plan provides a roadmap for the future and lessens the risk of events beyond the organization's control impacting our operations;
- The Authority's **WRAP (Water Residential Assistance Program)** continues to support GLWA's strategic commitment to water affordability through payment assistance, home water audits, minor plumbing repair and replacement, and conservation education. Since its inception in March 2016, 78 percent of GLWA member communities have opted-in to WRAP, a first of its kind program in Michigan and one of only a few sustainable assistance plans in the country. Over the last four years, nearly 23,000 households across GLWA's service area have enrolled in WRAP. [The program has continued to be refined](#) to meet the region's ongoing needs. Recent changes include revising eligibility requirements from 150 to 200 percent of federal poverty levels, allowing eligible rental households to take advantage of conservation and plumbing repairs, and allowing seniors who have successfully completed the 24-month program to continue receiving WRAP's \$25 per month bill assistance credit;
- GLWA's Board of Directors has approved a new [Business Inclusion and Diversity \(BID\) Program](#) to strengthen its commitment to affordability, equity and inclusion. It is designed to assist the Authority in expanding its pool of skilled resources, support economic development throughout the region, and ensure sustainability in its procurements. The program built upon the Small Business Initiative (SBI) launched in 2018, a highlight of which is a Strategic Alliance Memorandum between the Authority and the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBI effort allows the two organizations to work together to match small business owners with future procurement opportunities.

Environmental Stewardship

- In a step toward a green future, GLWA launched the **Biosolids Dryer Facility (BDF)** in 2016. The facility has the ability to turn 700 million to 1.1 billion gallons of biosolids into environmentally friendly, Grade-A "exceptional quality" fertilizer every year rather than burning or landfilling it. As the largest biosolids drying facility in North America, it established Detroit as a national leader in environmentally-sound biosolids production, producing around 56 percent less

carbon dioxide emissions than incineration and reducing several air pollution concerns, including odor;

- GLWA has improved water quality through advancements at its **Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF)**, the largest single-site wastewater treatment facility in North America, including [successfully launching the Rouge River Outfall Disinfection Facility](#) (RRO). The RRO ensures every drop of water discharged into the Rouge River from the WRRF is entirely screened, treated, and disinfected, addressing what had been GLWA's largest annual point of discharge of treated, but non-disinfected wet weather flows;
- In 2019, the Authority attained a milestone achievement of [surpassing federal and state regulators' goal of reaching a 40 percent reduction in phosphorus levels](#) by 2025, six years ahead of this deadline. GLWA not only met the federal and state requirements, but it has also been able to reduce its phosphorus levels by approximately 60 percent in treated and discharged waters from its WRRF. It is the first treatment facility along the tributary to Lake Erie to achieve this milestone.

Innovation

- Based on its proven ability to transform operations through new technologies and innovative approaches, GLWA has maintained national recognition as a ["Utility of the Future Today"](#) for last three years. Its most recent recognition was for its work in watershed health and protection and the establishment of a Watershed Hub in conjunction with watershed protection and advocacy groups. The Watershed Hub is collaborating on a regional water quality monitoring program. Previous recognition was received for biosolids reuse and partnering and engagement;
- [GLWA's partnership with the city of Detroit and Michigan State University's](#) (MSU) College of Engineering has been at the forefront of U.S. wastewater utilities using the system to identify virus outbreaks. Last April, the project expanded to help MSU refine its research to focus on COVID-19. It continued to expand in late 2020 with additional funds from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) to monitor more communities to detect the presence of COVID-19 in untreated sewage one to two weeks before an outbreak is reported by health officials;
- In an effort to leverage our resources for our member communities, GLWA has been hosting an Artificial Intelligence platform for the regional water system that helps to support local operations. Data from the tool helps inform decision making at the local system level to manage water quality, water loss and asset management;
- Continuing its commitment to providing structured educational opportunities for its team members, in 2019 GLWA launched a regional training academy, the One Water Institute, which provides quality education, training and leadership development opportunities to its own team members, as well as member partner staff;
- GLWA has partnered with Isle Utilities in a technology evaluation program to collaborate on shared technology needs and interests. The program hosts regular technology forums based on topics submitted by our member partners related to the operational problems are they are seeing at the local level. GLWA seeks out vendors and technology companies that are working specifically in these areas of

concern so that we can help them integrate or find solutions to the problems they have identified.

Quality

- A team of skilled treatment professionals has ensured that the water we produce is of unquestionable quality. In fact, GLWA has remained in compliance with all state and federal drinking water standards every day for the last five years;
- GLWA's [annual PFAS testing](#) confirms that the chemical remains nondetect in our drinking water, with levels below what is measurable under the EPA's standard analytical methodology for the detection of the compounds;
- The Authority is a leading utility in the state of Michigan, as well as the United States in monitoring for PFAS in the waste stream. As a part of its [Industrial Pretreatment Program responsibilities](#), GLWA has taken a proactive approach to working with its point source industrial dischargers to remove PFAS in advance of it entering the wastewater system – now a model approach being recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. GLWA is one of the first utilities in the country to develop and submit a PFOS-PFOA Pollutant Minimization and Source Evaluation Program.

“While it is important to look back on our first five years, it is even more important to have a strong focus on the future,” said McCormick. “I’m grateful for the tireless efforts of our team members, especially over the last year, as we have faced the unprecedented challenges brought about by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as the incredible partnership we have continued to build with our member partners and stakeholders. I am confident that we will continue to work together to ensure long-term sustainability and outstanding water services in the regional system.”

For more information on GLWA, please visit www.glwater.org.

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About the Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA)

The Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) is the provider-of-choice for drinking water services to nearly 40 percent, and efficient and effective wastewater services to nearly 30 percent, of Michigan’s population. With the Great Lakes as source water, GLWA is uniquely positioned to provide those it serves with water of unquestionable quality. GLWA also has the capacity to extend its services beyond its 88 member partner communities. As part of its commitment to water affordability, the Authority offers a Water Residential Assistance Program to assist low-income households in participating member communities throughout the system. GLWA’s board includes one representative each from Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties, two representatives from the city of Detroit, and one appointed by the Michigan governor to represent member partner communities outside of the tri-county area.