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Great Lakes Protection Fund Announces Leadership Awards for Water Technology Innovation

50 Years After Cuyahoga River Fire, the Fund Lauds Forward-Thinking Efforts to Restore Health of the Great Lakes

Evanston, Illinois -- The Great Lakes Protection Fund today named six organizations from the United States and Canada as recipients of the 2019 Great Lakes Leadership Award for Water Technology Innovation. The award highlights efforts to advance water technology innovation—addressing current threats and anticipating future challenges to the ecological health of water in this region and beyond.

The winners of the 2019 Great Lakes Leadership Award for Water Technology Innovation are: AquaHacking, the Cleveland Water Alliance, Current, The Everglades Foundation, Imagine H2O, and The Water Council. Each of these organizations has built rich networks of entrepreneurs, financiers, public entities, and private industries to spur innovation for the benefit of the basin's people and environment. The Fund—an innovation endowment established by the Great Lakes governors—created the Leadership Awards to celebrate efforts that accelerate new actions for protecting and improving the Great Lakes and have the potential to improve water quality on a global scale.

"These entrepreneurial leaders are advancing new technologies that address critical challenges facing the Great Lakes," explained David Rankin, executive director of the Fund. Rankin praised the winners for their ability to bring an influx of creative ideas, citizen involvement, private capital, and collaboration to benefit the Great Lakes. "With these awards, the Great Lakes Protection Fund is recognizing innovative efforts to drive massive improvement in the health of the Great Lakes and help secure clean water for the future."

Representing 84 percent of North America's surface fresh water, the Great Lakes offer drinking water to 40 million people and support a $5.8 trillion regional economy. A vital resource for the entire region, the Lakes provide more than one trillion gallons of water each day for drinking, generating electricity, irrigating fields, and supporting industrial operations.

"We've come a long way in the 50 years since the infamous Cuyahoga River fire, but challenges remain. Excess nutrients, toxic pollution, and invasive species can still make our waters unsafe for drinking, swimming, or fishing," said Rankin. "Increasing rainfall, inadequate infrastructure,

and growing pressure on our water resources require new solutions. The six organizations we are recognizing today offer great hope for the future of the Great Lakes."

Over the past three decades, the Fund has invested $84 million to improve the health of the Great Lakes and provided another $50 million directly to the Great Lakes states to further their individual protection efforts. The Fund's investments include the world's first ballast water treatment system on a working vessel, creating the foundation for a ballast technology industry worth $17.4 billion as of 2017, and dramatically decreasing the introduction of invasive species in the Great Lakes and elsewhere.

The 2019 Great Lakes Leadership Awards for Water Technology Innovation go to:

- **AquaHacking Challenge, Montreal, Quebec.** AquaHacking encourages young innovators to research and develop clean-tech solutions to issues impacting water quality. Currently focused on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence watershed, the group plans to roll out efforts across Canada by 2020. By connecting the winning teams to data, mentors, and experts in water, programming, artificial intelligence, design, data analysis, business strategy, and marketing, Aquahacking ensures young entrepreneurs are incubated until they are able to take their new ideas to market. For example, one recent winner is addressing the blue-green algae crisis in Lake Erie by developing a portable system to capture water samples and identify different species of blue-green algae in the water on site—faster and much more cost effective than the current method of shipping water samples back to a lab.

- **The Cleveland Water Alliance, Cleveland, Ohio.** The Cleveland Water Alliance (CWA) is working to make Lake Erie the first Smart and Connected Great Lake. Through its Erie Hack innovation challenge and its work to create an early warning system for toxic algae in Lake Erie, CWA is identifying promising new technologies that are poised to have a significant impact on water management and treatment. Working with a network of partners throughout the region, the economic development and innovation organization empowers citizens, companies, and universities around Lake Erie to be part of the solution. These challenges have engaged hundreds of tech experts, engineers, data scientists, and entrepreneurs to solve critical water issues in the region and beyond. A winning team from CWA's first Erie Hack competition is preparing to equip concerned citizens with 3D-printed hand-held monitors that will enable easy and reliable collection of water-quality data as part of a collaboration with community foundations across the Lake Erie Basin.

- **Current, Chicago, Illinois.** By sourcing and de-risking innovative water technology solutions for industries, utilities and investors, Current connects innovators to opportunities. The nonprofit's niche is understanding what water users need to solve their water-related problem. It uses its database of more than 500 vetted technologies and global network of industry leaders to find the best possible match for its partners. This summer, the organization plans to launch H2NOW Chicago, the first real-time water quality monitoring project in the United States to measure microbial pollutants in an urban waterway. Until now, testing water for microbes required sending water samples to a lab for several days of analysis. H2NOW will measure microbial levels in the Chicago River in real time and make the results easily accessible online. As more businesses leverage the public appeal of the river's shoreline, Current is driving sustainable development by directly engaging local residents in the health of the waterway.

- **The Everglades Foundation, Palmetto Bay, Florida.** One challenge to addressing water quality problems can be getting people's attention. The Everglades Foundation took that problem head on by announcing a $10 million prize to the most scalable, safe, and cost-effective way to combat phosphorus pollution—a global problem shared by the Great Lakes,

Florida, and many other places in the world. Launched in 2016, the George Barley Water Prize—the largest water prize in history—aims to jumpstart new solutions to the environmental effects of phosphorus pollution that have been decades in the making. The Foundation has elevated the profile of this global problem and attracted more than 100 teams with new ideas and technologies to solve it. Since different technologies thrive under different conditions, the effort has identified a wide variety of solutions that will address challenges well beyond those in Florida.

- **Imagine H2O, San Francisco, California.** Each year, Imagine H2O's highly selective Accelerator provides entrepreneurs with the capacity, development resources, marketing and visibility, customer validation opportunities, and access to investors needed to scale their businesses. Since 2009, the Accelerator has helped launch more than 100 water technology companies and attract over $425 million in startup capital. Imagine H2O startups located in the Great Lakes region are tackling issues including heavy metals testing and compliance, industrial wastewater treatment, groundwater management, and software solutions for utility managers. The organization's 2019 Accelerator recently honored Indiana-based 120WaterAudit for its utility software and logistics solution for communities responding to water contamination issues.

- **The Water Council, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.** Headquartered at the Global Water Center—a state-of-the-art facility that draws water technology businesses from throughout the globe—The Water Council (TWC) connects more than 238 water technology businesses with its 200 industry members. TWC's BREW (Business – Research – Entrepreneurship – in Water) gives start-up businesses the tools needed to get promising technology to market. Each year, the nonprofit supports a cohort of freshwater technology companies through an intensive business development curriculum. Since 2013, the group has trained 34 startups and maintains an 85 percent success rate. TWC's new Tech Challenge allows innovative individuals to vet their water tech ideas with industry experts. Program applications can be accessed through WaterTechHub.com, a global connector of industry and water technology solutions.

Each of the winning organizations will receive a $15,000 prize to advance its work. The Fund will work with the recipients to share ideas and seek opportunities to work together to promote clean water technologies and solutions that will defend the Great Lakes from future threats.

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About the Great Lakes Protection Fund:

The Great Lakes Protection Fund works to identify, demonstrate, and promote regional action to improve the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem. The Fund is a permanent, private, nonprofit corporation that launches innovative solutions to improve the health of the Great Lakes. Since 1989, the Fund has awarded more than $84 million in support to catalyze the continuous development of new technologies and practical regional actions to improve the health of the Great Lakes. Learn more at http://glpf.org/.