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GREAT LAKES

Initiative gets politicians across the spectrum to back conservation



A group heads out for a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative airboat tour at Crow Island State Game Area in Saginaw on Aug. 25, 2020. MLive.com files

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has provided billions to improve the environment.

Mike Shriberg for The Conversation

In a time of political polarization, it's easy to forget that the vast majority of Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs — 80% or more, depending on the poll — value environmental conservation.

However, this support is not easily or often translated into successful, popular initiatives.

One success story is the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Since 2010, it has provided more than \$5 billion to improve the quality of the region's environment, with an overarching goal of cleaning up the water in the Great Lakes watershed. And it has survived multiple attempts to reduce its funding or eliminate it altogether.

As a water policy and politics expert and a former leader in the Great Lakes advocacy community who has worked on and analyzed the initiative, I worked with environmental historian and Great Lakes expert Marc Gaden along with a team of graduate students to comprehensively assess the initiative and determine useful lessons learned for other projects in conservation and beyond.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has funded more than 8,000 specific projects, focusing on cleaning up especially toxic locations, controlling invasive species, restoring natural habitat and educating the next generation of leaders.

**A BIT OF BACKGROUND**

The Great Lakes contain approximately 20% of the world's available surface freshwater, providing drinking water to over 40 million people in the U.S. and Canada and billions of dollars annually in economic activity and ecological productivity.

Throughout most of the 20th century, the ecosystem in and around the lakes was degraded and contaminated due to raw sewage, industrial waste, invasive species, loss

of natural habitats and runoff pollution from development, among other issues.

Many problems remained even after the major environmental and Great Lakes laws of the late 20th century took effect. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has funded more than 8,000 specific projects, focusing on cleaning up especially toxic locations, controlling invasive species, restoring natural habitat and educating the next generation of leaders.

Government reports, public opinion polls, economic analysis and many other accounts suggest that the initiative has not only been successfully implemented and popular but has led to positive results for water quality, habitat restoration and wildlife while boosting the local and regional economy.

**DEEP CONNECTION**

These results didn't happen by accident, and they weren't inevitable. Our research team identified converging forces, some unique to the Great Lakes but many broadly applicable, that led to this success.

Underlying each force is the iconic status of the waters themselves. People in the region feel a deep attachment to the lakes and the quality of life they enable, with more than 50% of residents engaging in walking/hiking, swimming, boating or simply being with family and friends along the lakes.

**SEE GREAT LAKES, A2**

ELECTION 2026

Primary takeaways: Clear winners and close races

Governor candidates won easily while Democratic Senate candidates slugged it out.

Michael Kransz mkransz@mlive.com

From a blowout in the Democratic race for governor to a close U.S. Senate primary, there were plenty of headlines from Michigan's primary on Tuesday.

Here are five takeaways from the state's 2026 primary election, which featured contests for governor, U.S. House and Senate, state House and Senate, and local offices.

For state and federal primary results, visit MLive at [tinyurl.com/mliveaug4](http://tinyurl.com/mliveaug4).

**BENSON CRUISES**

Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson won the Democratic primary for governor in a landslide over Genesee County Sheriff Chris Swanson.

Democratic voters coalesced around Benson, giving her 83.1% of the vote, compared with Swanson's 16.9%, according to the Associated Press. The AP estimated 95% of votes had been counted as of Wednesday morning.

The AP called the race for Benson about an hour after polls closed at 8 p.m.

On the Republican ticket, the picture was much more divided.

U.S. Rep. John James received 50.1% of the vote and was declared the winner by the AP shortly before 10:30 p.m. The only other Republican candidate with an active campaign, businessman Perry Johnson, received 35.2% of the vote.

The other Republicans on the ballot, former state Attorney General Mike Cox and Michigan Senate Minority Leader Aric Nesbitt, both suspended their campaigns in July. Because they exited the race late, their names still appeared on the ballot.

Cox received 13% of the vote, while Nesbitt received 1.8%.

The AP estimated 99% of the votes had been counted in the primary as of Wednesday morning.

**SEE ELECTION 2026, A3**

IN YESTERDAY'S EDITION

**Pioneer's gift left a lasting legacy**

Hailed as one of Michigan's most influential pioneers, John Ball is best remembered today for the zoo that bears his name, but his legacy extends further.

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CHARLES ZHANG, CFP®, MBA, MSFS, CHFC

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