

# The Great Lakes Bay Sustainability Pledge

2021

**FINAL PROJECT REPORT**

**GREAT LAKES BAY REGIONAL  
ALLIANCE + DELTA COLLEGE**

**DOW COMPANY FOUNDATION**

**UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN AND THE  
DOW SUSTAINABILITY FELLOWSHIP**



PHOTO BY SRIKANTH PEETHA ON UNSPLASH

# Executive Summary

## SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE

The mission of the Great Lakes Bay Regional Alliance (GLBRA) is to “encourage, support and celebrate regional collaboration and initiatives that will improve the economic vitality and quality of life in the Great Lakes Bay Region.” This region includes four Michigan counties: Midland, Bay, Saginaw, and Isabella. Under the auspices of their mission, the GLBRA launched the Sustainability Pledge in the spring of 2021. The Pledge aims to provide a framework for regional organizations to move toward a more sustainable future through voluntary, self-evaluative action, and goal setting. Following the launch of the Pledge, leadership from GLBRA and Delta College identified seven regional organizations able and willing to serve as pilot organizations.

Once pilot organizations were identified, the 2021 Dow Fellowship Team worked with GLBRA leadership to develop scoping sessions for each pilot organization, which in turn informed the creation and refinement of the self-assessment sustainability roadmap. To

Sustainability should meet “the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

- The Brundtland Commission, 1987

### About our Partners

**The Dow Fellows Team would like to thank our partners and the important role they played in advancing this work.**

#### Dow Company Foundation

This work was supported by the Dow Company Foundation through the Dow Sustainability Fellows Program at the University of Michigan.

#### The Great Lakes Bay Regional Alliance

The Great Lakes Bay Regional Alliance (GLBRA) “encourages, supports and celebrates regional collaboration and initiatives to improve the economic vitality and quality of life in the Great Lakes Bay Region.”

#### Delta College

Delta College, a local academic institution and GLBRA partner.

#### Dow Sustainability Fellows

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#### University of Michigan Academic Advisor

Dr. Raymond De Young  
Associate Professor; School for Environment and Natural Resources, Behavior, Education and Communication

develop the roadmap, the Dow Fellowship Team conducted an in-depth literature review and compiled over 100 sustainability resources covering a range of sustainability familiarity and expertise. The roadmap includes a suite of curated tools customized for each pilot organization, as well as an interactive workbook for current and future planning. In addition, the Dow Fellowship Team led one-on-one visioning sessions with each pilot organization to determine their unique organizational sustainability priorities and challenges, and developed a comprehensive survey administered to each pilot organization that encouraged them to expand on the sustainability goals previously outlined through visioning.

At the conclusion of the project, the Dow Fellowship Team created six highly designed, customized, interactive, and forward-looking roadmaps for each of the pilot organizations. Each roadmap includes sections such as Sustainability Strategy, Climate, Purchased Goods, Waste, and Water, People, and an additional section for industry and organization-specific certifications. In addition, the 2021 Dow Fellowship

Team identified five areas of future growth and research that were outside the scope of this year’s project, from which a 2022 Dow Fellowship Team can make informed decisions about which direction they would like to take their own project in consultation with GLBRA leadership.



# Introduction & Background

This project brought together pilot organizations from Michigan's Great Lakes Bay Region to set a new vision for sustainable operations and practices.

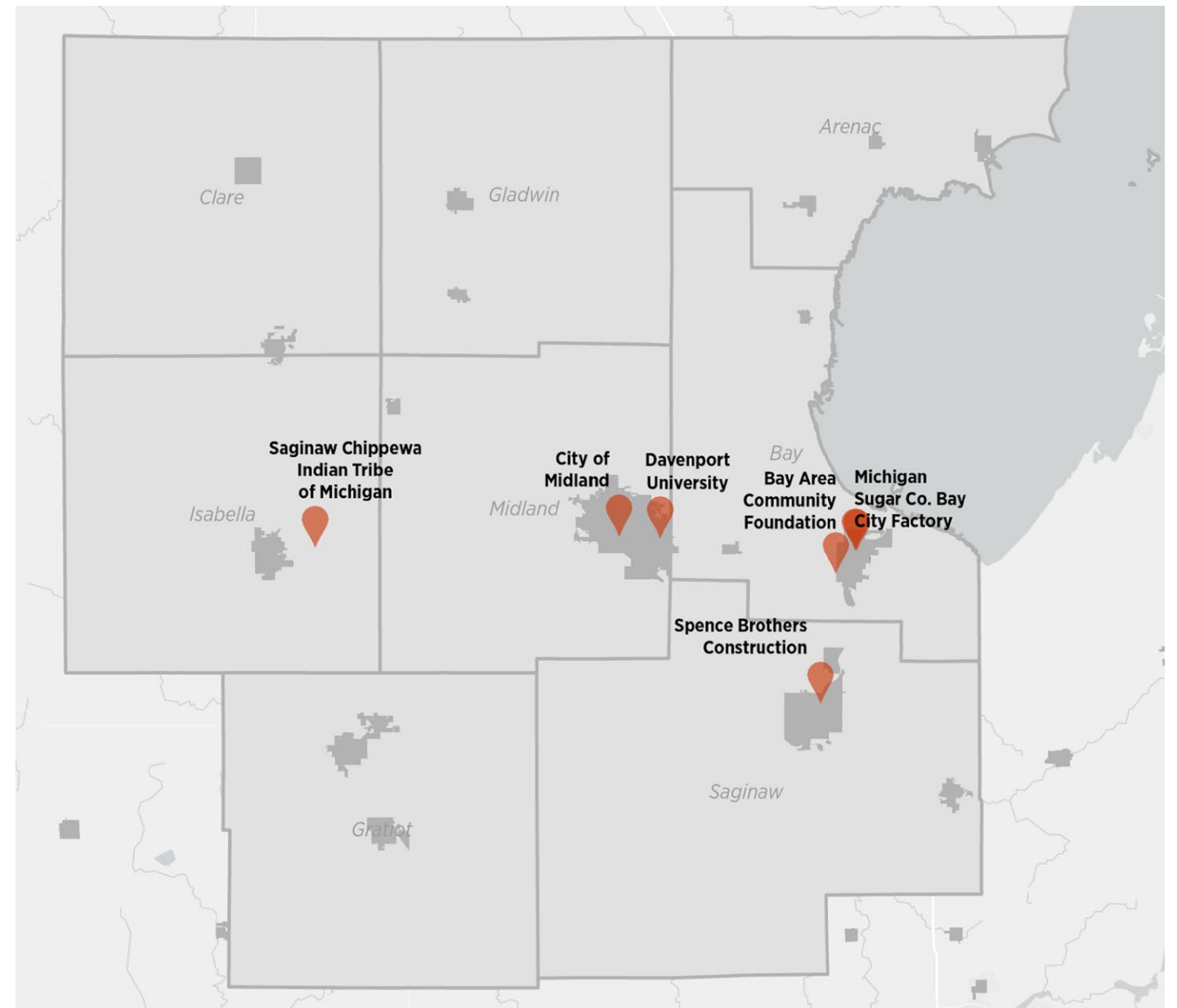
## SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE

The Michigan Great Lakes Bay Regional Alliance “encourages, supports and celebrates regional collaboration and initiatives to improve the economic vitality and quality of life in the Great Lakes Bay Region” within Midland, Saginaw, Isabella, and Bay counties. The GLBRA established the original concept for a Regional Sustainability Pledge, and with the assistance of Delta College, has taken the lead on developing partnerships with local organizations.

The objective of the GLBRA Sustainability Pledge is to provide a framework for regional organizations to move toward a more sustainable future through voluntary, self-evaluative action, and goal setting. The Pledge consists of a guided self-assessment that covers seven areas of sustainability and prompts the generation of a suite of resources intended to aid sustainability actions, and is tailored to each participating organizations' unique circumstances. This self-assessment targets a variety of operational levels instrumental to organizational sustainability including

service delivery, business administration, and employee care. Though 2021 would be its inaugural year, the Sustainability Pledge Advisory Committee envisions continual improvement and enhancement of the Pledge as part of a larger commitment to encourage the local business community to take on an active role in regional sustainability.

The 2021 Dow Fellowship Team worked with the GLBRA and with Delta College to develop and refine the self-assessment sustainability roadmap for a pilot group of seven participating local organizations grounded in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and based on current climate and sustainability research, existing certifications, nationally published best practices, and programs across Michigan and the United States more broadly. The 2021 Dow Fellowship Team expects that this framework can later be adapted to fit future participating organizations with diverse sustainability needs and opportunities.



## BACKGROUND

The GLBRA is an organization with a mission to “encourage, support and celebrate regional collaboration and initiatives that will improve the economic vitality and quality of life in the Great Lakes Bay Region.” Various GLBRA-participating organizations had expressed interest in a self-evaluative sustainability pledge that can identify areas for improvement, help to develop new strategies, track progress toward sustainability goals and publicly display their

commitment to the environment. This regional pledge provides support for individual organizations through information-sharing and goal-monitoring as well as helps to develop a regional reputation of sustainability.

Our team collaborated with and guided the GLBRA and Delta College, a local academic institution and GLBRA partner, to both develop and refine a self-assessment sustainability framework for the pilot group of participating organizations, and to also ensure future partners have access to, and can adapt this framework, to fit a variety of sustainability needs and opportunities.



# Methods

Our process relied on intensive research and benchmarking of best practices, alongside input from our pilot organizations.

The Great Lakes Bay Regional Sustainability Pledge Advisory Committee, Delta College, and the 2021 Dow Fellowship Team created a suite of sustainability resources for participating organizations based on each pilot organization's responses to a comprehensive sustainability assessment. These resources were compiled into comprehensive Sustainability Resource Roadmaps for each participating organization. The Resource Roadmaps will be accessible as an onboarding resource for future participants of the GLBRA Sustainability Pledge Program. These resources include a variety of options for the organization to address areas of improvement identified in their sustainability assessment.

To develop the sustainability assessment and suite of resources, the 2021 Dow Fellowship Team (we) engaged in a three-step process of: Assessment, Scoping and Scaling.

## PHASE 1: ASSESSMENT

### Spring 2021

At the onset of the project, our team worked closely with the GLBRA and Delta College to clarify goals and expectations, to define the parameters of the Roadmap, and to identify strategies for recruiting pilot organizations. With the assistance of our team, the GLBRA conducted informational calls and issued summary materials and an interest survey to their member organizations (see Appendix AA). From this effort, GLBRA recruited seven organizations to participate in the pilot of the Sustainability Roadmap: Davenport University, Michigan Sugar, Spence Brothers, Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, City of Midland, Bay Area Community Foundation, and Midland Center for the Arts. We organized orientation calls to connect with and get to know the primary contacts and stakeholders from each organization.

The Assessment phase of the project entailed identifying the current pilot organizations' sustainability initiatives (if any exist), operating

procedures, capacity to track metrics and values regarding sustainability practices. Identifying these key aspects of sustainability was foundational for curating the suite of resources. Additionally, this portion of the project included performing preliminary research such as: literature reviews, market landscape analysis on previous sustainability pledges, design-thinking visioning sessions (conducted virtually using Google Jamboard, an interactive brainstorming tool), case studies across different geographical regions and industry sectors and behavioral psychology interventions that may aid in ensuring long-term sustainability within each organization. For this portion of the assessment, we conferred with our academic advisor, Dr. Raymond De Young, on a monthly basis, as he has knowledge and experience in the field of behavioral psychology. Additionally, we conducted conversations with experts in impact assessment and metric tracking, such as Jennifer Prancing from Dow.

## PHASE 2: SCOPING

### Summer 2021

The Scoping phase of the project enhanced the work done in the subsequent Assessment phase to determine which sustainability goals are most important to pilot organizations and to identify strategies for changing pilot organizations' practices, operations or infrastructure. For this portion of the project, we worked directly with the pilot organizations to understand their priorities and any financial or logistical constraints to implementing sustainable changes. Priorities were analyzed for two main themes: consistency and potential for long term impact. We used a survey, interviews and visioning sessions to explore the current status of sustainability initiatives, each organizations' beliefs and values, and any existing challenges to implementation of sustainable initiatives.

During this visioning exercise, we compiled a shared document, which included the following questions:

how might we define short and long term success for the Sustainability Roadmap; what challenges or hurdles might the adoption of the Sustainability Roadmap by organizations need to overcome; what challenges or hurdles might the management of the Sustainability Roadmap need to address; and, how might we design the Sustainability Roadmap to be as engaging as possible. From this visioning workshop we were able to highlight key themes and categories that would ensure the success of this project. Please see Appendix A and B for a full list of these themes and categories.

This visioning process also helped highlight the need to develop a plan for executing preliminary research on relevant topics that would aid in the creation of the Sustainability Roadmap. Our research plan included exploring the following topics to strengthen and ensure the longevity of this pledge: behavioral psychology, regional and local policy of the Great Lakes Bay region, technical metrics, financial metrics, case studies and operational governance. The preliminary research (including academic papers, industry standards, governmental programs, calculation examples) is housed in an Excel spreadsheet with tags for each of the aforementioned topics.

## PHASE 3: SCALING

### Fall 2021

In the third phase, Scaling, we curated a suite of resources that addresses the following themes: Sustainability Strategy, GHG Emissions Monitoring, Renewable Energy Strategy, Purchased Goods, Waste, Water and People. Our team designed a full resource guide and workbook for each pilot organization that highlights the resources that align with their organizational mission and capabilities, and guides them in goal-setting for each theme.

With the information gleaned from our visioning process, we developed a sustainability assessment survey asking each organization to evaluate their



current sustainability strategies, if any existed, in the following categories: overall organizational sustainability, climate (ex. carbon emissions reductions), water, purchased goods, built environment, and diversity, equity and inclusion. If the organizations indicated they did not have sustainability strategies in any or all of the above categories, we included a section for them to describe how they plan on implementing these strategies in the future. This assessment was used to develop customizable Sustainability Roadmaps for each of the seven organizations. Please see Appendix F for the full survey assessment.

We disseminated our sustainability assessment survey, analyzed the results, and compiled customizable Sustainability Roadmaps for each of the seven pilot organizations. During this process, we consulted closely with the GLBRA and Delta College partners to ensure the final deliverables met their standards and expectations for the project, and to ensure adequate accessibility of these resources for future program participants.

During this phase, we also worked with Delta College and GLBRA to brainstorm a governance and/or ownership structure for these resources and secure a more permanent location for the final deliverables. Currently, these resources are housed within GLBRA and Delta College, but we have also prepared a proposal to continue this project in 2022 with a second Dow Fellowship Team, and believe that a long-term governance structure could be developed as part of that project (See Appendix G).

Lastly, our team is setting the stage with a project proposal for a 2022 Dow Fellowship Team to continue this work. Evaluating pilot organizations' success or progress participating in this process will be foundational for bringing on additional organizations in the coming years. We will again collaborate with our clients and the University of Michigan Dow Fellowship Program Coordinators to ensure a smooth transition of this project to the next cohort of Dow Sustainability Fellows, if selected.



PHOTO: DELTA COLLEGE



# Deliverables, Results & Recommendations

## THE SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

Based on research of best practices and client input, our team created the Sustainability Assessment. The intent of this survey was to establish a benchmark for each pilot organization – from which our team could offer curated resources and the organization could track progress toward sustainability goals over time. The Sustainability Assessment was created in Google Forms, and each pilot organization had approximately three weeks to complete the survey.

The Sustainability Assessment grouped questions into thematic sections such as: Sustainability Strategy, Climate, Purchased Goods, Waste, Water, People, and an additional section for industry and organization-specific certifications (Refer to Appendix F). Within each section, we included questions that gathered both qualitative and quantitative responses as to the priorities and activities of the pilot organization within that area. These questions aligned with established and credible sustainability metrics, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, SASB Materiality Standards, and GHG Protocol Standards. The pilot organization responses to the Sustainability Assessment gave our

team important insights into the current sustainability metrics, goals, organizational priorities, and current resources of each organization.

## SUSTAINABILITY ROADMAP

Upon receiving the Sustainability Assessment results from each pilot organization, the 2021 Dow Fellowship Team analyzed each organization’s responses and created a Sustainability Roadmap of resources based on their responses and stated priorities. In conjunction with the Sustainability Assessment, the 2021 Dow Fellowship Team compiled and organized all resources identified during the research process that align with each of the assessment sections. Not all of these resources were used in the Sustainability Roadmap, due to level of complexity, specificity of resource, and total quantity limitations for each Roadmap. However, the 2021 Dow Fellowship Team wanted these resources to be available to GLBRA, Delta College, and pilot organization team members in the future. These resources currently exist in a Google Sheet that will be transferred to the GLBRA and Delta leaders. Within each section, resources are identified as a Beginner, Moderate or Advanced level, and include a description of how



the resource may be useful to pilot organizations (some resources may be particular to specific industries or specific pilot organizations), and a hyperlink to access the resource.

Each pilot organization received a digital and printed Sustainability Roadmap with resources based on their responses to the Sustainability Assessment. The document is divided into the sections: Sustainability Strategy, Climate, Renewable Energy, Purchased Goods, Waste, Water, People, and an additional section for industry and organization-specific certifications. These pages include an overview, how the pilot organization responded, 5+ resources with explanations on how to leverage the information or tool, and a built-in SMART goal-setting area for each section. The last page of the document is a “workbook” layout for the organization team to outline all the SMART goals into a comprehensive sustainability strategy for their chosen timeline. This ensures the document is not only informative, but actionable to support the GLBRA vision for regional sustainability advancement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2021 Dow Fellowship Team recommends that future project leaders host an in-person or virtual launch event for clients and pilot organizations in order to (1) allow pilot organizations to network with each other, (2) deliver a “Sustainability 101” primer to pilot organizations and (3) present curated resources to each pilot organization through their Sustainability Roadmap. The goal of this event would be to provide space for pilot organizations to ask questions, learn from one another, and set goals in real time. The event also provides an opportunity for the pledge pilot organization team members to develop relationships and continue the conversation for the next few years.



# Anticipated Project Impact

Each pilot organization now has an individualized Roadmap and workbook to create SMART goals for each of the sections. This guide is meant to support each of the pilot organization teams as they embark on the next phase of the sustainability journey: action. The 2022 cohort will continue the work of the pledge as outlined by Figure 1 below. The gaps in reporting are based on the fact this is the first year of the Pledge and the recommendations to the pilot organizations have not yet been implemented. However, progress on the metrics in each section would be advantageous for GLBRA and Delta to promote when recruiting future organizations.

## Anticipated Project Impact:

We anticipate this Sustainability Pledge and individualized Sustainability Roadmap will assist local organizations in the Great Lakes Bay region of Michigan to enhance the sustainability of their operations – from setting a sustainability strategy, to reducing their carbon emissions through reduction or purchasing renewable electricity. However, sustainability is not just about

carbon emissions. The impact extends to resource consumption more broadly in supply chains or water consumption and impact on communities and people. Additionally, we anticipate this Pledge and Roadmap will assist the pilot organization in understanding more about what data are needed in sustainability reporting, from waste numbers and electricity consumption to organizational support for sustainability initiatives and procurement/supply chain risks and benefits due to climate impacts. While it is not the primary incentive for participating in the Sustainability Pledge and outlining SMART goals in the workbook, we anticipate this Pledge will enhance financial cost savings for each of the pilot organizations. While it is not possible to estimate cost savings for each organization, the quantity of savings will depend on what goals the organization sets and the time horizon of those goals. For example, an organization may choose to implement waste and energy reductions strategies that save on operating costs. Lastly, we anticipate that helping these organizations enhance their overall sustainability metrics will have a positive impact on the communities

they serve by reducing their ecological footprint, whether through energy efficiency, reduction of water consumption, or building a more resilient supply chain to serve the local community. We look forward to the 2022 cohort constructing a system or outline for tracking the Sustainability Pledge pilot organization impact over time in each of the sections listed.

Since the Pledge and Roadmap will be organization and industry-specific (i.e. restaurants, services, manufacturing, etc.), environmental outcomes will vary based on final metrics selected. Below are the categories of the Sustainability Roadmap, the associated UN SDG and example metrics the pilot organizations could track and publicly report.

## SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

- UN SDG #13 - Climate Action
- UN SDG #9 - Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
- Setting a plan of action on the below sections
- Public commitment to sustainability reporting

## CLIMATE

- UN SDG #13 - Climate Action
- UN SDG #9 - Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
- Tracking and reporting Carbon (CO<sub>2</sub>e) emissions with a plan to reduce
- Identifying largest emission contributors within organization

## RENEWABLE ENERGY

- UN SDG 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy
- UN SDG 13 - Climate Action
- Reduction of Carbon (CO<sub>2</sub>e) emissions through purchasing green power or decreasing consumption by implementing energy efficient upgrades

## PURCHASED GOODS

- UN SDG #12 - Responsible Consumption and Production
- UN SDG #2 - Zero Hunger
- Waste diverted or avoided through supply chain optimization
- Cost savings due to reduced supply chain disruptions

## WASTE

- UN SDG #11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities
- UN SDG #12 - Responsible Consumption and Production
- UN SDG #2 - Zero Hunger
- Waste diverted or avoided through composting, upcycling, or other landfill diversion activities.

## WATER

- UN SDG #6 - Clean Water and Sanitation
- UN SDG #14 - Life Below Water
- Reduction of water consumption
- Implementation of water conservation efforts in high water stress areas.
- High water stress refers to areas with poor water quality and/or access. It also refers to areas that may experience adverse effects of climate change in the coming years such as drought or flooding.
- Public health benefits from clean water.

## PEOPLE

- UN SDG #10 - Reduced Inequalities
- UN SDG #8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth
- Community benefits through providing jobs, reducing overall ecological footprint, and engaging in environmental justice activities.





## **METRICS FOR SUCCESS**

Some examples of metrics and measures are outlined below:

- Reduced Carbon (CO<sub>2</sub>e) emissions (energy efficiency, reduced transportation, reduced electricity consumption, renewable energy strategy, reduction of waste, etc).
- Waste Diverted or Avoided (recycling, organics, or landfill waste)
- Water Commitment Goals (reduced irrigation of landscapes, stormwater runoff capture, wastewater reclamation)
- Cost Savings and return on investment (ROI) values supported by environmentally advantageous activities
- Public Health Benefits gained from the following metrics: Water Commitment Goals, Waste Diverted or Avoided, and Reduced Carbon Emissions.
- Environmental/Social Justice Implications
- Community Benefits (e.g., potential net present value of outcomes, return on investment, jobs created or maintained).



**The Great Lakes Bay Region  
Sustainability Pledge**

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**2021**