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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 28, 2014

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**MAYOR EMANUEL, SENATOR DURBIN, GOVERNOR QUINN ANNOUNCE THE GREAT LAKES
DESIGNATED AS A CRITICAL CONSERVATION AREA**

*Designated as One of Eight Critical Watersheds in the United States; Eligible to Compete
for \$138 Million in Federal Grant Funding*

Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Senator Dick Durbin and Governor Pat Quinn announced today that the Department of Agriculture designated the Great Lakes Region as one of eight "Critical Conservation Areas" within the United States. The watershed is now eligible to compete for \$138 million in federal grant funding through the USDA's new Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

"The Great Lakes are an invaluable watershed to the Midwest and the entire country," said Mayor Emanuel. "Today, Secretary Vilsack recognized the importance of this conserving this essential waterway for the future so our children will continue to have access to this incredible natural resource. Working with our Congressional and regional partners, we will ensure the Great Lakes' sustainability and viability for years to come."

"Protecting America's waterways is vital to our way of life and this new USDA initiative – made possible through the Farm Bill – makes supporting local conservation efforts along Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River a national priority," said Senator Durbin. "These new public-private partnerships will have a positive impact on local producers and farmers in Illinois while spurring job creation and maximizing our nation's commitment to conservation and public health."

"By recognizing the Great Lakes Region as a Critical Conservation Area, we can continue making our waterways and the life they sustain a priority," Governor Quinn said. "We welcome the jobs this federal partnership will create to help grow our regional economy. It is our shared responsibility to protect the Great Lakes and this new program will only enhance these vital water resources."

The Great Lakes are a national treasure, a significant economic resource, and an invaluable recreation ecosystem. In 2011, the University of Michigan released a study showing 1.5 million jobs and \$62 billion in wages were directly attributed to the Great Lakes. This designation will allow farmers to more effectively utilize conservation programs and continue to act as environmental stewards.

The recently passed Agriculture Act of 2014, commonly referred to as the Farm Bill, establishes this innovative Regional Conservation Partnership Program to create and fund new joint partnership

agreements with producers and local entities, including water quantity and quality.

The other critical watersheds that are eligible to compete for grant funding include: the Upper Mississippi River Basin, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, the Mississippi River Basin, the California Bay Delta; the Prairie Grasslands Region; the Colorado River Basin; the Columbia River Basin; and the Longleaf Pine Range

Beyond providing a source of safe drinking water, Chicago's waterways support a wide variety of uses that are critical for our economy, recreation, public health, natural assets, and quality of life. With 26 miles of public lakefront and 28 miles of riverfront, enjoyment of and access to water is an amenity that exists for all 2.7 million Chicagoans. The city's 24 free public beaches along Lake Michigan are invaluable assets that serve over 20 million visitors per year.

Annually, more than 50,000 commercial and passenger vessels travel the Chicago River, serving as a crucial route for shipping and recreation. Our waterways also serve as critical habitat for wildlife, from migrating birds to the 70 species of fish that are known to live in the Chicago River.

With continued investment and sustainable stewardship, Chicago is poised to strengthen its competitive advantage as a leader in water quality, management, and access. The City continues to take major strides to improve the long-term sustainability of the water system and our waterways. These efforts include renewing water infrastructure, conserving water, greening water operations, and sustainably managing stormwater.

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