



Strategic Plan *for the* Great Lakes Commission

—— 2023 – 2027 ——

ADOPTED MARCH 2023

Authority

The Great Lakes Commission is an interstate compact agency established by the **Great Lakes Basin Compact of 1955** and legislative action by the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio and Wisconsin, and the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The U.S. Congress gave its consent to the Compact in 1968. The Canadian provinces of Ontario and Québec joined the Commission as associate members via a Declaration of Partnership in 1999.

Article I of the Great Lakes Basin Compact created the Commission to implement its terms and requirements, as follows:

- 1. To promote the orderly, integrated, and comprehensive development, use, and conservation of the water resources of the Great Lakes Basin.*
- 2. To plan for the welfare and development of the water resources of the Basin as a whole as well as for those portions of the Basin which may have problems of special concern.*
- 3. To make it possible for the states of the Basin and their people to derive the maximum benefit from utilization of public works, in the form of navigational aids or otherwise, which may exist or which may be constructed from time to time.*
- 4. To advise in securing and maintaining a proper balance among industrial, commercial, agricultural, water supply, residential, recreational, and other legitimate uses of the water resources of the Basin.*

The Compact speaks to the need for a consultative and recommending body to assist its party states and provinces in managing Great Lakes water resources, while recognizing that party states have responsibility and authority, pursuant to state and federal law, to protect their waters and water dependent resources. The terms of the Compact consistently speak to the intertwining of beneficial uses with the conservation of water resources, and the need for an agency to advise on achieving sustainability and balance among multiple uses.

Vision

The Great Lakes Commission is a binational leader, collaborative partner, and trusted voice ensuring the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River and their watersheds are resilient to climate change and support a healthy environment, strong economies and communities, and high quality of life for current and future generations.

Mission

The Great Lakes Commission represents, advises, and assists its party states and provinces by fostering dialogue, developing consensus, facilitating collaboration, and speaking with a unified voice to advance collective interests to further a strong economy and healthy environment, and to achieve the balanced and sustainable use of Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin water resources.

Values

As an interstate agency, the Great Lakes Commission is guided by and serves the common interests of its party states and provinces. The Great Lakes Commission also gratefully acknowledges the Indigenous nations whose homelands are part of this region as the original stewards of the Great Lakes basin and whose stewardship efforts continue today. The following values set the standards to which the Commission aspires in carrying out its work in service to its party states and provinces.

- **Regional perspective:** We bring a regional perspective to federal, state, and provincial programs, policies, projects, and priorities.
- **Leadership:** We are ambassadors for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River region and serve as liaisons within and beyond the region.
- **Diversity and inclusivity:** We are inclusive and seek out diverse views through existing and new partnerships.
- **Collaboration and partnership:** We respectfully advance our goals in close coordination with the International Joint Commission, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, the Conference of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers, and continuous dialogue with other regional institutions and relevant entities.
- **Transparency:** We are open and transparent in carrying out our work.
- **Integrity:** We exhibit the highest levels of honesty, credibility, and accuracy in the information, recommendations, and perspectives that we convey.
- **Objectivity:** We are nonpartisan, balanced, and science-based in our work.
- **Sustainability:** We incorporate principles of sustainability and adaptive management in our work.
- **Equity:** We believe the Great Lakes are an unrivaled natural resource that should benefit all people and communities in the basin and future generations.

Services

The Great Lakes Commission is uniquely suited to serve its party states and provinces and the region in specific capacities as outlined in the Compact. Services provided by the Commission are central to how the agency works toward achieving its goals, fulfilling its mission, and advancing its vision for the region.

Facilitation and Consensus Building: The Commission facilitates, convenes, and participates in forums that address issues of interest to the parties. By serving as a trusted broker of information and research and facilitating dialogue among diverse perspectives, it helps build consensus on solutions to challenges and opportunities facing Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River water resources.

Policy Coordination and Advocacy: The Commission helps the parties speak with a common voice by coordinating, analyzing, advising, communicating, and advocating shared policy and funding priorities. The Commission also collaborates with other regional, national, and international organizations to advance common interests.

Information Management and Delivery: The Commission collects, integrates, and makes accessible high quality and unbiased data and information to enable the parties and others to develop sound policies, manage and adapt programs, and make informed decisions affecting the water resources of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River region.

Regional Program Management: The Commission secures resources and coordinates activities that address common interests of the parties and provides capacity to manage projects and administer funding to partners to advance shared goals.

Communications and Outreach: The Commission shares information that raises public awareness, supports effective decision-making, and promotes Great Lakes stewardship. The Commission maintains active, continuous communication with federal, state/provincial, Indigenous, and local governments, and other stakeholders.

Goals and Actions

The following goals articulate the outcomes the Commission seeks to advance in partnership with its party states and provinces and other entities. A series of actions are identified for each goal that reflect the projects and activities the Commission will undertake to work toward these goals and fulfill its mission over the five-year timeframe of its strategic plan.

Resilient Great Lakes Basin

Great Lakes basin communities, infrastructure, ecosystems, and the economy can withstand, adapt to, and recover from climate-related stressors and changing conditions to ensure equitable and inclusive social, economic, and environmental well-being across the basin.

<i>Priority Areas</i>	Actions
<i>Resiliency</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve as a coordinator and facilitate implementation of the <i>Action Plan for a Resilient Great Lakes Basin</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Convene regional forums and processes for sharing data, coordinating action, evaluating risks and challenges, and deploying strategies to advance and fund climate resilience in the Great Lakes basin ○ Develop a Blue Accounting issue to contribute to decision-making and measuring progress on climate resiliency ○ Develop and maintain a publicly available interactive resource library to highlight existing climate resilience knowledge, resources, and tools • Develop model policies and/or recommendations that advance best practices for sustainable and resilient coastlines across jurisdictional levels, including different shoreline management approaches and associated environmental and economic impacts • Support the states and the Army Corps of Engineers in their efforts to implement the Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study • Facilitate and advance opportunities to provide direct assistance to communities to plan, integrate, and implement projects and programs that build resiliency to the impacts of climate change, clean up and restore waterfront areas, upgrade and replace vulnerable infrastructure, provide recreation opportunities and foster economic development, and contribute to sustainability
<i>Science coordination</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In coordination with other regional partners, advance the development and implementation of an ecosystem based, long-term science and monitoring program for the Great Lakes that will improve the region’s capacity to better understand current conditions, forecast impacts and potential benefits of mitigation measures, predict challenges, and inform the region’s ability to respond to those challenges • In support of the Great Lakes Association of Science Ships (GLASS), convene annual Great Lakes science vessel coordination workshops that are designed to facilitate the exchange of ideas and improve science vessel operations across the Great Lakes

Clean and Safe Water

Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River water resources are protected from pollution and impacts from climate change and extreme weather; are accessible to people; provide high-quality drinking water; and are managed in a balanced, equitable, and sustainable manner for the benefit of current and future generations.

<i>Priority Areas</i>	Actions
<i>Drinking water</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance regional awareness and understanding of issues with access to safe drinking water and explore the data necessary to identify issues with drinking water access, with an emphasis on disadvantaged communities • Compile and share information on private well programs and policies across the region to better understand risks and challenges • Develop a common understanding of clean water and drinking water revolving fund program investments, priorities, and needs across the region and advocate for programs that provide grants for clean water infrastructure • Maintain Blue Accounting’s drinking water issue and develop additional metrics in support of established goals • Advance a binational community of practice or collaborative organized around Great Lakes groundwater and source water modeling, management, and policy • Facilitate information-exchange and support funding, policies, and programs to address established and emerging threats to water quality (e.g., PFAS)
<i>Harmful algal blooms</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene and facilitate the Great Lakes Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Collaborative to advance prevention and mitigation of algal blooms on the Great Lakes by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sharing information and best practices among states and provinces through Commission-sponsored forums and written materials ○ Identifying and sharing regional priorities with federal and other partners ○ Coordinating activities, including outreach and public awareness efforts, and facilitating coordinated action with the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement Annex 4 Subcommittee ○ Coordinating research efforts through symposia and an interdisciplinary work group to share methods and results ○ Facilitating impactful, continuous communication between researchers, policymakers, and funders through written materials and convenings ○ Advancing research to explore and validate new technologies for the prevention and treatment of algal blooms • In coordination with the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement Annex 4 Subcommittee, maintain Blue Accounting’s Lake Erie Algae issue to share data and track progress toward the regional commitment to reduce phosphorus in western Lake Erie by 40% by 2025

continued on next page

<i>Nonpoint source pollution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate implementation of projects and activities that reduce sediment and nutrient loads into Great Lakes basin waters through the Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program (GLSNRP) and ongoing partnerships with USDA’s NRCS, conservation districts, authorities, and agricultural interests • Pursue opportunities to provide assistance and support communities interested in green infrastructure and improving stormwater management practices using the former Green Infrastructure Champions and Great Lakes Stormwater Collaborative projects as models
<i>Environmental justice and equity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate and support information-sharing on equity and environmental justice efforts and resources for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River region • Provide information and promote equity in decision-making regarding water access and water use that is reflective of the Great Lakes region
<i>Emergency response</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide data and information to states and provinces to support planning and decision-making for emergency preparedness and response for oil and hazardous materials spills

Sustainable and Equitable Water Use

Communities, businesses, and agriculture sustainably leverage Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River water resources as assets to support strong economies and a high quality of life for all residents.

<i>Priority Areas</i>	Actions
<i>Water use</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In partnership with the Conference of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers, support decision-making and measure progress under the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement and Water Resources Compact by: compiling, interpreting, and disseminating consistent water withdrawal, diversion, and consumptive use information; supporting the cumulative impact assessment called for under the Compact and the Agreement; and providing information on regional trends and state and provincial programs, practices, and policies related to water use and conservation • Convene forums, facilitate studies, and disseminate information to support decision-making and increase understanding of forecasted future demand on Great Lakes water resources and associated risk and challenges, including anticipated impacts from climate change, changes in population, and shifts in agriculture and energy production

Safe and Reliable Waterways

Harbors and waterways support recreational uses and a Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River maritime transportation system that efficiently and sustainably moves goods and enhances the competitiveness of the region’s economy and international trade.

<i>Priority Areas</i>	Actions
<i>Navigation and maritime transportation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for federal polices and investments that support a sustainable and reliable Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River maritime transportation system, including: dredging to maintain authorized depths of channels and harbors and additional depth needed in critical areas; repairing and upgrading aging navigation infrastructure; ensuring adequate icebreaking capacity; developing sustainable strategies for managing dredged material; and supporting the development of technologies to improve the system’s environmental performance • Compile and disseminate data and information related to regional goals set by the <i>Strategy for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Maritime Transportation System</i> through Blue Accounting’s maritime transportation issue, including economic data and information • Facilitate mechanisms for identifying and coordinating best practices, harmonizing policies, and providing technical assistance on emerging opportunities within the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River maritime transportation system, such as cruise tourism, decarbonization, short-sea shipping, “smart” technology and data-sharing systems, and containerization
<i>Recreation and tourism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the 2007 Great Lakes recreational boating economic impact study in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers and others • Advocate for programs, polices, and investments that support sustainable small harbors across the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River system • Support a comprehensive update to and marketing of the Great Lakes Circle Tour utilizing modern tools and technology and integrating current tourism industry practices

Healthy Aquatic Ecosystems

Aquatic ecosystems and habitats support diverse and healthy fish and wildlife populations, are protected from the negative impacts of aquatic invasive species and other stressors, and provide cultural and economic benefits to local communities.

<i>Priority Areas</i>	Actions
<i>Aquatic invasive species</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene and facilitate regional aquatic invasive species (AIS) forums to share information and best practices, identify regional priorities, and coordinate research, management, and outreach activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Administer the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species as the primary forum for coordinating AIS prevention and control ○ Advance collaborative-based research and management of priority species that have negative impacts on the ecosystem and economy (e.g., Great Lakes Phragmites Collaborative, Invasive Mussel Collaborative, European Frog-bit Collaborative) ○ Coordinate regional action and identify best practices to address priority pathways of AIS introduction and spread • Conduct regional analyses to understand the policies and practices currently in place that contribute to AIS prevention and control, and opportunities to support regional harmonization efforts • Provide data and information to states and provinces to support planning and decision-making for early detection and response to new invasions • Compile and disseminate information on AIS with an increased risk of introduction/movement into the Great Lakes based on climate change projections • Maintain Blue Accounting’s AIS issue to compile and disseminate data and information on efforts to achieve regional prevention and control goals for AIS
<i>Coastal conservation and habitat restoration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage regional programs that restore and protect valuable habitat and water resources, such as NOAA-Commission Regional Partnerships, in coordination with the states, local communities, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Indigenous nations, and federal partners • Support opportunities, initiatives, and investments that identify and prioritize coastal conservation and habitat restoration needs, share knowledge, and contribute to decision-making

Supporting Actions

The Commission recognizes that its work alone is not sufficient to achieve the goals of this strategic plan. To be successful, the Commission must actively build and maintain partnerships and ensure resources and capacity are in place to support implementation. The following actions are included to highlight additional ways the Commission will advance its work over the next five years.

<i>Priority Areas</i>	Actions
<i>Partnerships and capacity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with other water-related commissions in the U.S., Canada, and abroad to share information, exchange strategies, and advance common goals directed at solving problems affecting Great Lakes water resources • Participate in and support the implementation of the binational Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, including participation with annex subcommittees • Increase engagement with Indigenous nations in the Great Lakes basin through regular and proactive communication and facilitating participation in Commission initiatives • Facilitate a mutually beneficial Commission Observer program and expand participation in the program to include underrepresented communities • Pursue joint staffing arrangements with federal, state, provincial, and regional agencies to enhance Commission and state capacity and expertise • Establish MOUs with partner agencies to support ongoing collaboration to advance mutual goals and objectives • Establish fellowship or internship programs in partnership with other agencies and organizations to develop new talent and increase workforce diversity • Pursue opportunities to advance job growth and workforce development in the water sector, partnering with colleges and universities across the region
<i>Communications and advocacy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support continued funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), and increase utilization of state-federal partnerships in allocating GLRI funds • Support Canadian federal programs directed at Great Lakes restoration and protection • Pursue a U.S. congressional authorization and appropriation to support Commission operations and allow the agency to proactively respond to and address regional priorities that support the balanced use, development, and conservation of Great Lakes water resources • In coordination with partners, facilitate regional dialogue and forums on significant initiatives affecting the balanced use, development, and conservation of Great Lakes water resources • Facilitate studies to quantify the economic value of Great Lakes water resources, including the industries that rely on the Great Lakes, ecosystem services generated by the Great Lakes, and the return on investment from environmental restoration and water-related infrastructure improvements • Provide accessible information to increase public awareness and understanding of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River system and empower action through mechanisms including Blue Accounting and Great Lakes Daily News