

# Shared Priorities for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River



*Advancing  
Equitable  
Restoration,  
Revitalization,  
and Resilience*

*-- May 2022*

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River are an integral part of Canada's and North America's economy, culture, history, and identity. More specifically, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin:

- Has more than 20 per cent of the world's surface freshwater;
- Is home to 98% of Ontarians, more than 70% of Québécois, and 1 in 10 Americans;
- Is invaluable as the source of drinking water for more than 40 million people in Canada and the United States;
- Directly generates more than 1.5 million jobs and \$60 billion in wages annually and is the foundation of a \$6-trillion regional economy, which would be one of the largest in the world if it stood alone as a country;
- Supports world-renowned recreation such as boating, hunting, and fishing opportunities, generating more than \$52 billion annually for the region;
- Sustains a viable commercial fishery that has been an important part of North America's history, culture, and economy which contributes jobs and healthy, sustainably-caught local protein for consumers; and,
- Is home to over 3,500 plant and animal species, some of which are found nowhere else on Earth.







Issues affecting the health of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River and their surrounding communities therefore have serious economic, social, and environmental impacts on a broad segment of Canadians.

For that reason, it is imperative for all levels of government, Great Lakes-St. Lawrence organizations, users of this freshwater resource, communities, and residents across the region to collaborate closely. In addition, we must work across national and provincial/state borders to tackle complex issues affecting the viability of our shared waterways. These include: invasive species, habitat loss, toxics and other harmful pollutants, such as plastics and microplastics, nutrient levels and bacteriological contamination, the safety of our beaches, and climate change impacts on water and shoreline infrastructure.

While continuing to restore degraded and contaminated areas within the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River basin, we must strengthen our ability to prevent future risks to the health of these vital waters if we are to protect them for future generations. This will require us to improve our science and predictive capabilities to get out in front of potentially adverse actions and impacts, and avoid further degradation. It will also require us to work collectively to address the contributors to, and impacts of climate change in our region.

In the interest of protecting and restoring these treasured freshwater resources, and building up their resilience, we are committed to working collaboratively with all stakeholders towards revitalizing the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River and the quality of life they sustain. We are committed to advancing the following priorities with the Government of Canada, provinces, and US federal, state and partner agencies and groups.



# IMPROVE BINATIONAL DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION IN GREAT LAKES-ST. LAWRENCE GOVERNANCE AND STEWARDSHIP

- Leverage the potential of the newly formed Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Task Force functioning within the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group.
- Capitalize on the knowledge and networks of binational and basin-wide organizations and agencies to advance greater cooperation across national, provincial, and state boundaries.





# ENHANCE COORDINATION AND GOVERNANCE OF DOMESTIC FRESHWATER MANAGEMENT TO BETTER ADDRESS THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND OTHER STRESSORS

- Establish and fully fund a Canada Water Agency in order to strengthen watershed management, science, protection, and restoration efforts within Canada's major freshwater basins, such as the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin.
- Leverage efforts to review, retool and strengthen the 50-year-old Canada Water Act to remain relevant and reflective of our new freshwater realities.

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# INCREASE FUNDING TO COMPLEMENT INVESTMENTS MADE INTO GREAT LAKES RESTORATION BY THE UNITED STATES

- Implement the federal government's commitment to invest \$1 billion over 10 years to protect and restore large lakes and river systems, with a priority focus on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.
- Launch a made-in-Canada "Great Lakes Restoration Initiative" that would permanently fund and support restoration and stewardship work throughout the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin.
- Use the Canada-Ontario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality and Ecosystem Health to identify priority areas for investment, and to ensure coordinated action and fully leveraged support for all annexes of the binational Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.



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# STRENGTHEN VITAL WATER AND SHORELINE INFRASTRUCTURE ACROSS THE GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE RIVER BASIN

- Expand investments in shoreline infrastructure renewal to support coastal communities adapting to the impacts of climate change, including enhanced access to coastal and climate data and information, and funding support for planning activities.
- Provide enhanced investments to support sustainable recreational access to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River, including docks, piers, marinas, and beaches.
- Create a dedicated funding stream for water and wastewater infrastructure and help ensure equitable access to safe drinking water, including the permanent removal of boil water advisories in Indigenous communities.
- Ensure the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin and the broader region receives an appropriate share of federal funding for protection, and shoreline resiliency.
- Support knowledge building and project implementation of nature-based solutions and green infrastructure across the region.



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# PUT FORWARD ADEQUATE PROTECTIONS FOR THE GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE RIVER BASIN FROM INVASIVE SPECIES

- Establish permanent and sufficient funding for programs and organizations delivering consistent, integrated, and prioritized education and outreach, early detection, and rapid response efforts to prevent introductions and establishment of new invasive species in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin, as well as implementing control projects for invasive species already in the basin.
- Build in consideration of invasive species risk when expanding trade opportunities affecting the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin.



*Photo by: M. Gaden, GLFC*



# TAKE ACTIVE MEASURES TO REDUCE POLLUTION AND IMPROVE WATER QUALITY ACROSS THE GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE RIVER BASIN

- Advance an integrated binational science plan to address the current and future needs of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.
- Develop and implement phosphorous Reduction Action Plans and Algae Mitigation Strategies for all Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River.
- Dedicate additional resources in the next Agricultural Policy Framework to support farmers working to improve water quality and protect wildlife habitat.



# LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR A PROSPEROUS GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE RIVER BLUE ECONOMY

- Invest in federal funding programs to expand workforce development and employment opportunities within in-demand industry sectors or occupations that will accelerate the development of Canada's Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River blue economy.
- Strengthen existing freshwater industries by providing the supports they need (e.g., workforce programs, training) to be a viable part of the region's blue economy.
- Bolster efforts by the public and private sectors that advance marine transportation, including port modernization and upgrading locks and maritime navigation systems.
- Invest in the science, management, and conservation efforts (e.g., habitat quality, contamination reduction) required to support thriving and sustainable recreational, commercial, and charter boat fisheries in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.
- Engage Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River groups to develop a freshwater pillar of the Government of Canada's Blue Economy Strategy to support growth and investment in sectors to bolster innovation, expand workforce development, increase employment opportunities, and maximize the potential of sustainable freshwater industries throughout the region.



Photo provided by: GLFC





*Photo by: A. Michls, GLFC*

# PARTNERS WORKING TOWARDS A HEALTHY GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE RIVER BASIN



COUNCIL OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION

BUILDING OUR FUTURE TODAY

Discover. Connect. Influence.

We also invite other organizations to join this ongoing dialogue and support a revitalized and resilient Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin.



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