



Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement Fact Sheet

2016 Progress Report of the Parties

The governments of Canada and the United States (the Parties) have issued the first Progress Report of the Parties describing the actions they have taken under the 2012 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Key actions completed since the Agreement took effect in February 2013 are discussed in the progress report and are highlighted below. The report also describes the organizational structure and processes put in place to support the Agreement. The full report is available at <https://binational.net>.

The International Joint Commission (IJC) wants to hear your views on the progress report and efforts in both countries to restore and maintain Great Lakes water quality. The IJC will prepare a synthesis of public comment on the progress report and will also consider your views as it develops its own assessment of progress. The various ways you can contribute to the discussion and provide your comments are listed on the last page of this fact sheet.

Areas of Concern

Forty-three locations in the Great Lakes basin were listed as Areas of Concern (AOCs) nearly 30 years ago because pollution and other human activities resulted in beneficial use impairments such as restrictions on eating the fish, beach closings and habitat loss. Since 2013, the United States removed Presque Isle (Pennsylvania), Deer Lake (Michigan) and White Lake (Michigan) from the AOC list after determining that clean up actions were complete and beneficial use impairments were eliminated. Canada completed all required actions to restore Nipigon (Ontario) and started work to address contaminated sediments in Hamilton Harbour. This will be the largest sediment remediation project ever undertaken in Canada. The progress report provides the status of actions in each of the 43 AOCs.

Delisted AOCs, including those delisted prior to 2013:

Collingwood Harbour (ON)	Severn Sound (ON)
Deer Lake (MI)	Wheatley Harbour (ON)
Oswego River (NY)	White Lake (MI)
Presque Isle Bay (PA)	



Credit: Abode Stock

Lakewide Management

For each of the Great Lakes and its connecting channels, the Parties committed to develop lake ecosystem objectives, Lakewide Action and Management Plans (LAMPs) and annual reports. Annual LAMP reports, issued in 2013, 2014 and 2015 provide an overview of accomplishments and challenges facing each lake. The Lake Superior LAMP, published in September 2016, finds that the ecosystem, including fisheries and habitat, continues to be in good shape. The LAMP identifies 29 projects to maintain the good condition of Lake Superior. A Nearshore Framework was approved in July 2016, which provides a systematic, integrated and collective approach for assessing nearshore health in the Great Lakes and communicating cumulative impacts and stresses.

Chemicals of Mutual Concern

The Parties committed to identify priority chemicals of mutual concern and develop binational strategies that may include pollution prevention, control, research and monitoring. Chemicals such as mercury, PCBs and PBDEs threaten aquatic ecosystems and human health when people consume contaminated fish. After releasing summary reports on candidate chemicals, the Parties designated the first eight chemicals of mutual concern. They also implemented a nomination process for stakeholders to recommend additional chemicals for consideration.

Chemicals of Mutual Concern designated in 2016:

Mercury: found in fossil fuels, consumer products and nature
Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs): found in electrical equipment
Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA): found in consumer products
Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS), used in industrial processes
Long-Chain Perfluorocarboxylic Acids (LC-PFCAs), found in Consumer products
Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs): found in flame retardants
Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD): found in flame retardants
Short Chain Chlorinated Paraffins (SCCPs): used in industrial

Agreement: The 2012 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement

Parties: The federal governments of Canada and the United States are the parties to the Agreement.

Progress report: The Progress Report of Parties is published once every three years. The full report is available at: <https://binational.net>.



Credit: Adobe Stock

Nutrients

Excessive nutrients in water, such as phosphorus, contribute to harmful algal blooms and nuisance algae. In February 2016, the Parties adopted several new phosphorus load reduction targets for Lake Erie. These include a 40 percent annual reduction in total phosphorus entering the western and central basins of the lake; a 40 percent reduction in total phosphorus flowing into the lake in the spring; and a 40 percent reduction in spring total and soluble reactive phosphorus loads from several watersheds that flow into the lake, all in reference to the 2008 baseline. These reductions are largely consistent with those recommended by the IJC and are necessary to minimize oxygen-depleted dead zones, maintain algal species consistent with a healthy ecosystem and prevent cyanobacteria levels that threaten human and ecosystem health.

Cyanobacteria: These bacteria are a form of blue-green algae that produce potent toxins.

Dead zones: These areas are typically near the lake bottom, where dissolved oxygen levels are so low that fish and other aquatic life cannot survive; oxygen depletion is generally caused by decomposing algae.

Harmful Algal Blooms: Excessive growth of blue-green algae, including cyanobacteria, is considered harmful because the blooms can disrupt ecosystems and produce toxins that can cause illness in humans, pets and wildlife.

Phosphorus: This element is used in a wide range of agricultural, industrial and domestic products and is the key nutrient that limits or increases the amount of algae in the Great Lakes.

Aquatic Invasive Species

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) are organisms originating from outside of the Great Lakes basin that are likely to cause negative impacts on native aquatic species, water quality, human health or the economy. Preventing invasive species from entering the Great Lakes is the best defense against harm from AIS. As a second line of defense, the Parties are developing an early detection and rapid response initiative to keep any new arrivals from becoming established. Other AIS actions by the Parties include: a binational assessment of the risks posed by grass carp establishment in the Great Lakes; a risk analysis of the illegal trade and transport of AIS used for bait, pond stocking, pets and other pathways; education and outreach programs for recreational users to minimize AIS transfer by boats and bait buckets; and developing design standards for building boats that are less likely to transport AIS.

Discharges from Vessels

The Parties note that past reports by agencies in both countries consistently indicated that potential discharges from ships of oil and hazardous substances, garbage, wastewater, ballast water and sewage are well-regulated. Both countries have implemented regulations to reduce the risk of introducing aquatic invasive species from discharges of ships' ballast water, including stringent binational enforcement of ballast water exchange requirements. No new aquatic invasive species from ballast water have been reported in the Great Lakes since 2006. The binational focus on prevention continues, including creation of a binational working group to discuss maritime transportation of oil and other hydrocarbons.



Credit: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Habitat and Species

The Parties committed to conserve, restore and enhance the resilience of native species and their habitats. Biodiversity conservation strategies were developed for all five Great Lakes to guide priority conservation actions among federal, state, provincial, tribal, academic, municipal and watershed management agencies.

Groundwater

The Agreement recognizes the important influence of groundwater quality on Great Lakes surface water quality. A May 2016 report on the relevant and available Great Lakes groundwater science examines connections to surface water quality, the sources of contaminants and nutrients, the influence of groundwater on aquatic habitats, and the impacts to groundwater from urban development and climate change.

Climate Change Impacts

The Parties publish a quarterly newsletter focusing on climate change impacts and outlooks for the Great Lakes region. The 2015 State of Climate Change Science in the Great Lakes Basin report synthesizes observed and projected climate change impacts and identifies key knowledge gaps. Collaborative efforts under the Great Lakes Evaporation Network have resulted in a growing network of measuring instruments that collectively endeavor to reduce the uncertainties of estimating the Great Lakes water balance. This network supports more robust projections of climate and water level variations.



Credit: Adobe Stock

Science

The Parties confirmed a set of Great Lakes ecosystem indicators and selected nine indicators that correspond to each of the Agreement's general objectives. These indicators will be used to develop the State of the Great Lakes Report, which will describe basinwide and lake-specific environmental trends and conditions. The Parties strengthened the Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative (CSMI) that helps to ensure binational coordination of Great Lakes-based science and research activities. Monitoring and research activities under the CSMI include intensive field work in one Great Lake each year. The timeline for this work coordinates with the development of Lakewide Action and Management Plans (LAMPs).



Credit: Adobe Stock

What are your views on the Progress Report of the Parties?

Now it's your turn: in your view, which government programs are working, and which are not? Does the Parties' progress report tell you what you want to know? Do they focus their actions on the most important challenges? Are the Parties following through on their responsibilities as described in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement? What issues do you feel are most pressing for the Great Lakes - in your area and the entire basin - and what additional actions are needed?

Learn about the various ways you can contribute to the discussion and provide comment

Citizens throughout the Great Lakes basin can participate in a series of online and in-person discussions and meetings through April 2017 to provide their perspectives about progress by the governments of Canada and the United States under the 2012 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.



Credit: Adobe Stock

Great Lakes Public Meetings: Speak Up For the Lakes You Love

The governments of Canada and the United States released their progress report last fall, and the IJC released its [draft assessment report](#) in January 2017. Now it's your turn to tell us how you feel about the governments' progress report, the IJC's draft assessment report, and generally how you feel the lakes are faring. Join us at one of the following public meetings:

Thursday, March 2: Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and Michigan
Delta Hotels by Marriott, 208 St. Mary's River Drive, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario
6 p.m. public meeting

Tuesday, March 21: Detroit, Michigan, and Windsor, Ontario, Roundtable and Public Meeting
Michigan Department of Natural Resources Adventure Center, 1801 Atwater, Detroit, Michigan
1-4 p.m. roundtable with local experts on key issues (the public is welcome to attend and listen to the conversation), 6 p.m. public meeting

Wednesday, March 22: Sarnia, Ontario, and Port Huron, Michigan Public Roundtable
Lochiel Kiwanis Community Centre, 180 North College Ave., Sarnia, Ontario
1:30-4:30 p.m. public roundtable

Thursday, March 23: Toledo, Ohio Public Meeting
University of Toledo Lake Erie Center, 6200 Bay Shore Road, Oregon, Ohio
6 p.m. public meeting

Tuesday, March 28: Buffalo, New York, Roundtable and Public Meeting
WNED-WBFO Studio, 140 Lower Terrace, Buffalo, New York
1:30-4:30 p.m. roundtable with local experts on key issues (the public is welcome to attend and listen to the conversation), 6 p.m. public meeting

Wednesday, March 29: St. Catharines, Ontario, and Niagara Falls Public Roundtable
Alumni Hall, St. Catharines Rowing Club, Henley Island Drive, St. Catharines, Ontario
1:30-4:30 p.m. public roundtable



Online Discussion at ParticipateIJC

The IJC will host a series of monthly and weekly online discussions on ParticipateIJC. The sharing platform will include valuable information about the Agreement and provide opportunities for citizens throughout the Great Lakes region to contribute photos, stories and comments, and talk with others about progress to restore and protect the lakes.

ParticipateIJC is also where you can submit written comments about the PROP, the IJC's draft assessment report, and how you feel the lakes are faring. All comments are welcome until April 15, 2017 at www.ParticipateIJC.org.

The IJC wants to hear your views and is accepting public comment until April 15, 2017 at www.ParticipateIJC.org or the following addresses:

International Joint Commission
1717 H Street NW, Suite 801
Washington, DC 20440
Commission@washington.ijc.org

International Joint Commission
234 Laurier Avenue West, 22nd Floor
Ottawa, ON K1P 6K6
Commission@ottawa.ijc.org

For more information about the International Joint Commission, visit www.IJC.org.