

Protecting the Waters of the Great Lakes: Great Lakes Water Management



A FACTSHEET OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION'S WATER RESOURCES CAMPAIGN

The Great Lakes are a Valuable Resource

The Great Lakes are one of our most unique and precious resources, providing freshwater for 33 million of people that live within the Basin and supporting the region's ecosystem and economy. The Great Lakes Basin contains nearly 20 percent of the earth's fresh surface water. It is the only freshwater system of its kind in size and ecological diversity and is essential to humans and wildlife alike; providing homes, food, recreation, and economic sustainability.



Lake Erie is vitally important to Ohio's environment and economy. The lake is a center of commerce and industry, supporting agriculture, shipping, heavy manufacturing, and electricity generation. It supplies drinking water to 11 million people, 3 million of whom live in Ohio. Lake Erie supports the largest sport fishery in the Great Lakes and the one of the largest commercial freshwater fisheries in the world, underpinning a \$1 billion sport fishing industry. Lake Erie generates \$8.5 billion dollars annually from fishing, tourism and travel revenue. Lake Erie is a resource worth protecting and improving, and it is clear that we need our water here at home where it can support our way of life.

The Great Lakes are at Risk



The Great Lakes are vulnerable to depletion and degradation. The Great Lakes are a vast resource, but each year rainfall and snowmelt replenish only about one percent of the water in the basin. The other 99 percent is finite and nonrenewable. That fact coupled with a growing demand for water by domestic users—including utilities, agriculture, manufacturers, and housing --and proposals to export water to other parts of the U.S. and to foreign countries, is cause for concerns about the Great Lakes' future. Current laws are not strong enough to protect the Great Lakes.

Great Lakes leaders have a responsibility to keep the region's freshwater resources safe for future generations.

Threats to Great Lakes Water Supplies

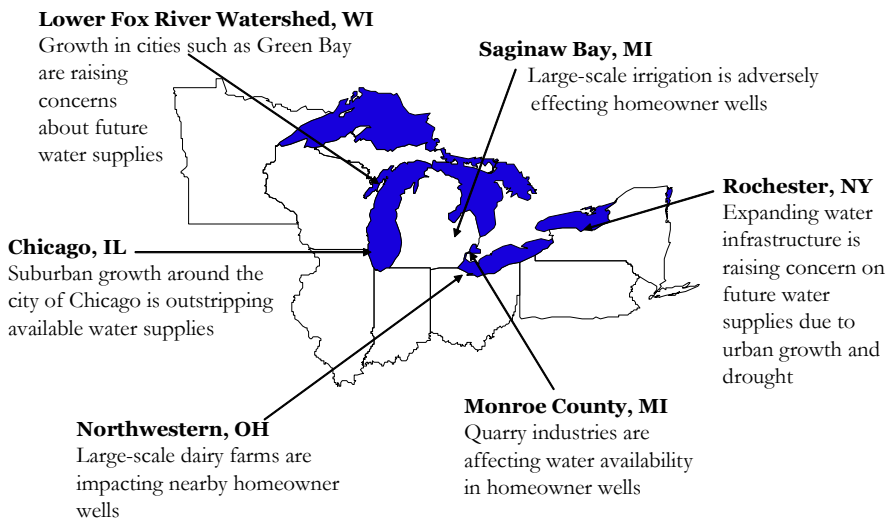
Threats to Great Lakes water security range from local overuse to misguided export schemes. Unregulated water use has stressed some Great Lakes basin groundwater sources to the point that nearby wells have failed. In addition, private companies and others have proposed selling and shipping Great Lakes water out of the basin, where it can no longer replenish the fragile ecosystem. More than 1 billion men, women, and children around the world do not have access to safe drinking water. It has been said that if "(t)he wars of the 20th century were fought over oil. The wars of the 21st century will be fought over water." Current laws, including the Federal Water Resources Development Act, are not enough to protect the Great Lakes against the many pressures they will undoubtedly face in the future.



Proposed Export and Diversion Schemes

- ◆ Shipping large quantities in tankers to Asia
- ◆ Pipelines to the South and Southwest US
- ◆ Re-floating the Mississippi River
- ◆ Refilling the Ogallala aquifer

Local shortages around the Great Lakes



While protecting the Great Lakes from diversions outside of the basin is a serious concern, currently the larger threat to the waters of the Great Lakes is wasteful water uses within the basin. It isn't enough legally or environmentally to prohibit diversions out of the basin without also dealing with in-basin uses.

The Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact: Protecting the Great Lakes

After nearly five years of negotiations, the Great Lakes Governors have endorsed precedent-setting agreements to protect and conserve the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact implements the Great Lakes Charter Annex signed by the parties in 2001. The Compact provides for comprehensive water use protections throughout the Great Lakes basin. If the Compact is ratified by all eight Great Lakes states and approved by Congress, it will become legally enforceable. That enforceability is what sets this agreement apart from other Great Lakes agreements.



For the first time in the Great Lakes basin, the Compact and Agreement:

- Treat groundwater and surface water as one system subject to the same standard
- Consider the Great Lakes and their tributaries to be one ecosystem
- Establish protection of the ecosystem and the economies that depend on it as a priority everywhere in the basin
- Ensure that every Great Lakes state will have the same baseline set of rational protections, while still allowing each state the flexibility necessary to manage in-basin water uses

The proposed agreements would protect the Great Lakes from harm by implementing a strong and effective water management program. These agreements close the door on diversions to places like the Middle East and the arid Southwest US, but they also put our own house in order by protecting us from unwise water use in the basin. Importantly, the Compact allows the Great Lakes states to maintain control over Great Lakes water in the face of growing demand from across the nation and the world. The Compact guarantees the long-term protection and sound management of Great Lakes water, ensuring that they are protected for generations to come.

This Compact is important to the citizens of Ohio who depend on the lakes for their way of life and for recreational opportunities. Governor Taft has asked the Ohio legislature to make Ohio the first state to ratify the Compact. The National Wildlife Federation hopes that Ohio will ratify the Compact and will protect the Great Lakes today and for future generations. Please consider supporting the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact when it comes before the Ohio legislature. A vote for the Compact is a vote for Lake Erie and the Great Lakes.

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