

2023
Annual Report



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Board of Directors as of December 2023.

Cover photo: Warren Dunes State Park on Lake Michigan
in Berrien County, Michigan. This page, clockwise from top
right: Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore on Lake Superior in
Munising, Michigan; an icy Lake Michigan behind the Chicago,
Illinois, skyline; Indiana Dunes National Park on Lake Michigan
in Porter, Indiana; a great blue heron in Presque Isle State Park
on Lake Erie in Erie, Pennsylvania; Lake Huron from Bruce
Peninsula National Park in Tobermory, Ontario.



A Message *FROM* THE Executive Director

I AM PLEASED TO SHARE WITH you the Great Lakes Commission's 2023 Annual Report. The GLC kicked off the year by adopting a new strategic plan, renewing its vision for 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 a high quality of life for current and future generations. The new plan puts forward five aspirational goals in support of this vision and sets targeted actions for the next five years.

In development of the strategic plan, it was clear that our strong partnerships across the Great Lakes community are essential to accomplishing our goals. We also recognize and embrace our central role in fostering dialogue, developing consensus, and facilitating collaboration among key partners, and helping the region speak with a unified voice to advance our collective interests. You will see examples of our partnership approach throughout the progress and accomplishments highlighted in this report.

In 2023, the GLC awarded nearly \$7 million in grants to local partners to implement on-the-ground actions to restore coastal habitat, prevent invasive species, and improve water quality. The GLC also signed new agreements with several federal agencies to support ongoing work, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey.

The GLC supported multiple regional collaborative forums to prevent and control invasive species, mitigate harmful algal blooms, coordinate science vessel activity, enhance regional spill response planning, and advance green shipping.

We continue to advocate alongside other regional organizations for federal programs and policies that will strengthen the economic and environmental health of the Great Lakes basin, such as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the U.S. Farm Bill, the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, and the Port Infrastructure Development Program.

While we are encouraged by these partnerships and the progress we are making, we know there is more work to do. In the strategic plan, the GLC developed a new goal focused on building a resilient Great Lakes basin, recognizing the significant impacts of climate change to our region. This goal is consistent with the *Action Plan for a Resilient Great Lakes Basin*, which the GLC adopted in 2022. Under these plans, the GLC is committed to serving as a convener that can help ensure resiliency efforts are coordinated, promote shared learning and resources, and foster strategic partnerships that accelerate our progress.

While much work remains to be done, this report shows the difference our efforts are making in the region. The significance of the Great Lakes cannot be understated, and we will continue working with the entire Great Lakes community to ensure they may be enjoyed for generations to come. ■



Erika Jensen

Erika S. Jensen
Executive Director



A view of the Mackinac Bridge and the Straits of Mackinac from Mackinac City, Michigan.



Strategic Plan

2023–2027



Presque Isle State Park on Lake Erie in Erie, Pennsylvania

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.

Services

The following 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**
- **Regional Program Management**
- **Policy Coordination and Advocacy**
- **Communications and Outreach**
- **Information Management and Delivery**

Goals

The following goals articulate the outcomes the Commission seeks to advance with the states and provinces and other partners over the five-year timeframe of the strategic plan.

- **Resilient Great Lakes Basin**
- **Safe and Reliable Waterways**
- **Clean and Safe Water**
- **Healthy Aquatic Ecosystems**
- **Sustainable and Equitable Water Use**

[Read the full GLC strategic plan at glc.org/about/documents](https://glc.org/about/documents)

Highlights AND Accomplishments

Resilient Great Lakes Basin

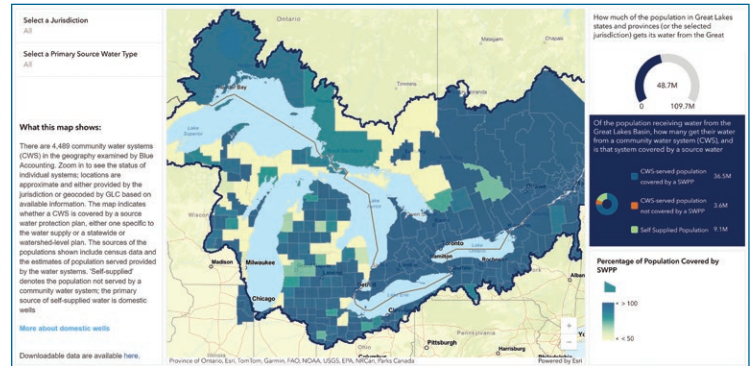
The GLC's *Action Plan for a Resilient Great Lakes Basin* is guiding the region's efforts to make the Great Lakes more resilient to the effects of climate change. The action plan helps to prioritize regional efforts and forms a roadmap to advance climate resilience in the Great Lakes. Implementation of the action plan is occurring through the work of many partners in the Great Lakes community, including the GLC. In 2023, the GLC continued convening our Standing Committee on Climate Resiliency to advise on GLC-led initiatives and hired a dedicated staff member to manage this process. At our 2023 semiannual meeting, the GLC hosted sessions highlighting coastal resiliency efforts underway across the basin, featuring expert panelists from U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, state agencies, and nongovernment partners.

The GLC was invited by our partners at the International Joint Commission to join the Great Lakes Science Collaborative and assist in the development of a detailed Great Lakes Science Plan. A robust, integrated science plan that leverages the resources and expertise of our entire region is key to

ensuring policy decisions, community investments, and resource management plans are structured to support the long-term health of our Great Lakes. We are committed to helping develop an implementation strategy over the next two years.

Clean and Safe Water

The GLC expanded its work to share drinking water data. Through data visualizations, users can investigate what work each jurisdiction is undertaking to eliminate lead in drinking water, whether drinking water is covered by a source water protection plan, and the trends in drinking water treatment violations. The GLC also launched an interactive map sharing the great work that communities are undertaking to advance water infrastructure in the Great Lakes basin, inspired by the recommendations



This data visualization tracks planning efforts that protect public drinking water sources for Great Lakes basin residents. View the visualization at blueaccounting.org/metric/source-water-protection/#Explore.



A grant from the GLC's Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program was awarded in 2023 to support Northland College's Mary Griggs Burke Center for Freshwater Innovation's sediment reduction project on North Fish Creek (above). The project addresses the largest sources of sediment flowing into Lake Superior's Chequamegon Bay in Wisconsin. Photo ©Northland College.

in our *Approaches for Improving Great Lakes Water Infrastructure: A Blueprint.*"

The GLC awarded more than \$1.5 million in grants to reduce the runoff of sediment, nutrients, and other pollutants into the lakes and their tributaries through the Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program. This program provides competitive grants to local and state governments, Indigenous Nations, and nonprofit organizations to install erosion and nutrient control practices in the Great Lakes basin, including innovative and unique practices not typically funded by other federal cost-share programs. In its more than 30 years of administration by the GLC, the Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program has prevented millions of pounds of phosphorus and tons of sediments from entering the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes Harmful Algal Blooms Collaborative, which is administered by the GLC, continued to facilitate communication among scientists and decision-makers to advance scientifically sound solutions for addressing



A panel presents an update on Lake Erie's harmful algal blooms to GLC commissioners and guests at the 2023 GLC Annual Meeting at Maumee Bay State Park in Oregon, Ohio.

nutrient pollution. This included hosting a daylong session at the annual International Association of Great Lakes Research conference in Toronto and developing a Research Mapper to identify projects around the basin that may be of interest to water managers. Additionally, the HABs Collaborative co-sponsored a summit on HABs and disturbance ecology, and is continuing work on a common agenda to guide future work.

GLC staff continued to develop and maintain Inland Sensitivity Atlas (ISA) data for the Great Lakes states of Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana. The ISA provides contingency planners and emergency responders with accurate and relevant sensitive information for spill preparedness and response. In addition to developing the ISA, GLC staff also work with U.S. EPA Region 5 and local partners to develop and maintain more contingency plans for subareas across these states.

Sustainable and Equitable Water Use

The GLC continues its decades-long work to share information on uses of Great Lakes water and manage the Great Lakes Regional Water Use Database. We released a report finding that 40.8 billion gallons of water per day were withdrawn from the Great Lakes basin in 2022, representing about a 3% decrease from 2021 withdrawals. Since 1988, the eight states and two provinces in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin have submitted water use data to the GLC, which compiles these datasets

into an annual report. New in 2023, we worked to develop a new database and website featuring a modern design that will be more secure, facilitate easier maintenance by staff, and will better serve the states and provinces and the public by making it easier to upload and access water use data. This update will be released in 2024.

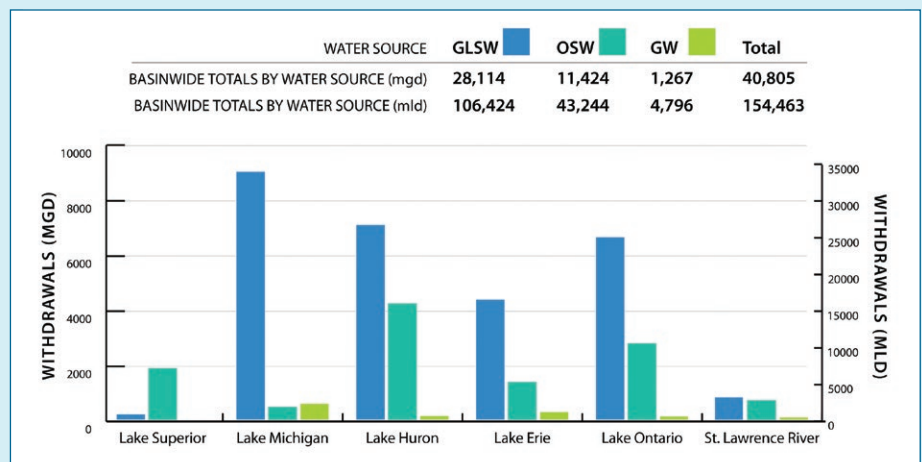
Safe and Reliable Waterways

The GLC advanced key policies and programs in support of safe, reliable, and sustainable transportation on Great Lakes waterways. At our 2023 Semiannual Meeting in Chicago, Illinois, the GLC passed a resolution pledging to support development and implementation of the Great Lakes Green Shipping Corridor Network and calling on Congress and the two federal governments

to dedicate resources to the Great Lakes maritime transportation system to support decarbonization at a regional scale. The GLC's executive director also assisted the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation and St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation in facilitating stakeholder meet-

ings on performance metrics and alternative fuels as part of the corridor initiative.

The GLC completed work with our Small Harbors and Coastal Communities Ad Hoc Committee, issuing a final committee report at our 2023 Annual Meeting in Oregon, Ohio. The report identifies priorities and actions to address needs for Great Lakes small harbors and provides information on the issues and challenges facing coastal communities and summaries of the many federal, state and provincial programs that contribute to their viability and sustainability. Also at the annual meeting, the GLC hosted a panel session on Great Lakes dredging needs and passed a resolution calling on Congress to appropriate adequate funding to maintain and dredge the 81 shallow draft recreational harbors in the Great Lakes.



The 2022 Annual Report of the Great Lakes Regional Water Use Database found that 40.8 billion gallons of water per day were withdrawn from the Great Lakes basin in 2022. View the report at waterusedata.glc.org.

Healthy Aquatic Ecosystems

The GLC was awarded more than \$10 million to fund habitat restoration in the Great Lakes basin. The funding accelerated work in the Niagara River and Maumee Areas of Concern (AOCs): the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park Restoration Project in Buffalo, New York; the Collins Park Restoration Project in Toledo, Ohio; and the University of Toledo Swan Creek Restoration Project, also in Toledo, Ohio. It was awarded as part of the fifth consecutive regional partnership between the GLC and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to restore Great Lakes coastal habitat, with a focus on areas of historic pollution known



Concept art for habitat restoration work funded in part by the GLC as part of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park Restoration Project in Buffalo, New York. Photo ©Western New York Land Conservancy.

as AOCs. In total, more than \$76 million has been awarded to the GLC to restore priority sites across the Great Lakes basin.

The GLC, in collaboration with NOAA and the city of Toledo, also announced two new habitat restoration projects in the Maumee Area of Concern. At Collins Park, a feasibility study will explore restoration options to improve riparian habitat along Duck Creek. A second project at Jermain Park will improve habitat along the Ottawa River, enhance 2.7 acres of wetland habitat and stabilize 2,300 linear



From left: Loren Wobig, GLC Commissioner and Director, Office of Water Resources, Illinois Department of Natural Resources; Olga Bautista, Executive Director, Southeast Environmental Task Force; Toni Preckwinkle, President, Cook County Board of Commissioners; Kim Du Buclet, Commissioner, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago; Michelle Parker, Vice President and Executive Director, Audubon Great Lakes; and Arnold Randall, General Superintendent, Forest Preserves of Cook County, break ground on the Powderhorn Lake Connectivity Project. Photo ©Audubon Great Lakes.

feet of eroding streambank. These projects are expected to move the Maumee closer to its official removal from the list of Great Lakes Areas of Concern.

The GLC was proud to celebrate the completion of habitat restoration at Powderhorn Lake on Chicago's Southeast Side after more than three years of work. The project reconnected Powderhorn

Lake and Wolf Lake to Lake Michigan, creating improved habitat for birds and fish and alleviating flooding for surrounding residents. The GLC and NOAA led the project in collaboration with local partners Audubon Great Lakes and the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

In June and July, hundreds of organizations across the region joined together to educate the public about aquatic invasive species (AIS) during the fifth annual Great Lakes AIS Landing Blitz. Volunteers demonstrated

to boaters and others how to prevent the spread of AIS, how to identify AIS, and how to report AIS, which are recognized as one of the most significant threats to the ecological and economic health of the Great Lakes. This annual event is coordinated through an international partnership of federal, state, and provincial agencies and Indigenous Nations with the support of the GLC. For the second year, the GLC also awarded more than \$85,000 in grants to groups to host local events, expanding the overall reach of the initiative and supporting



A 2023 Great Lakes AIS Landing Blitz event in Benzie County, Michigan. Photo ©Benzie Conservation District.



GLC Senior Program Specialist Theresa Gruninger counts *Phragmites* stems under the Zilwaukee Bridge in Zilwaukee, Michigan, during a *Phragmites* Adaptive Management Framework (PAMF) participant training session.

strategic education and outreach targeted to the recreational activities that can contribute to AIS introduction and spread in the region.

Under a new five-year cooperative agreement with the U.S. Geological Survey, the GLC continued to coordinate the critical work of invasive species collaboratives, including the Invasive Mussel Collaborative and the Great Lakes *Phragmites* Collaborative. The GLC also added the European

expanded and improved the existing regional surveillance framework and developed best practice guidance for aquatic plant surveillance. The GLC is also coordinating the development of an enhanced online interface to support regional prevention, early detection, and response activities. Additionally, the GLC is working with partners to identify the most efficient management approaches locally and regionally for priority species (plants, fish, and invertebrates).

Frog-bit Collaborative to its suite of collaboratives, and continued to support the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species, one of six regional panels that report to the federal Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, which coordinates AIS efforts on a federal level.

The GLC helps the Great Lakes states in their efforts to plan and coordinate interstate AIS early detection and response activities. The GLC ex-

Policy and Advocacy

In March, the GLC and our partners returned to Washington, D.C. to celebrate Great Lakes Day in person for the first time since 2019. More than 200 people — a record amount — attended the Great Lakes Day Congressional Breakfast Reception, where they heard from eight U.S. legislators and one member of Canada’s parliament.

In advance of the visit, the GLC presented a set of federal priorities to Congress and the Biden administration, including providing full funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and priorities for reauthorization of the Farm Bill. Ten key regional groups also participated in delivering a joint statement of economic and environmental priorities for the Great Lakes basin.

Reauthorization of the U.S. Farm Bill was a key focus of GLC policy and advocacy in 2023. This legislation represents the largest source of conservation funding for private lands in the federal budget and supports myriad activities essential to continued progress in protecting the Great Lakes from the impacts of nutrient pollu-



GLC Executive Director Erika Jensen (left) and U.S. Senator Gary Peters (D-Michigan) speak on Capitol Hill at the 2023 Great Lakes Congressional Breakfast as part of the annual Great Lakes Day in Washington, D.C.



The bulk carrier *Wilfred Sykes* travels through the Detroit River in downtown Detroit, Michigan.

Financials

Overall, the GLC continues to effectively manage its general, restricted and cash reserve funds to achieve the agency’s goals and objectives. These figures were confirmed by an independent audit, which is conducted each year to examine the GLC’s financial operations.

Fiscal Year 2023

The Great Lakes Commission concluded FY2023 in sound financial condition, with total revenues of \$7.191 million. Total revenues exceeded expenses by 0.43%. The 2023 fiscal year ended June 30, 2023.

tion, enhancing soil health and productivity, restoring habitat, and financing water and wastewater infrastructure improvements in rural communities. The GLC adopted a resolution encouraging Congress to act on the bill and recommending provisions to promote agricultural growth, sustainability, resilience, and conservation.

The GLC also engaged with the U.S. EPA’s Great Lakes National Program Office on development of Action Plan IV for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, including sharing specific recommendations in a policy resolution and hosting a panel on state-federal coordination at our 2023 Semiannual Meeting. The GLC is committed to ensuring that the states remain vital partners for both the federal government and local communities in implementation of the GLRI. ■

Revenues

Grants and contracts	\$ 6,349,886	88.30%
State contributions	736,000	10.23%
Meetings, other	53,674	0.75%
Interest income	8,239	0.11%
Change in fair value of investments	43,233	0.60%
TOTAL	\$ 7,191,032	

Expenses

Grants and contracts	\$ 4,469,884	62.43%
Personnel	2,045,312	28.57%
Office operations	388,885	5.43%
Program activities	151,112	2.11%
Travel	75,975	1.06%
Communication	28,671	0.40%
TOTAL	\$ 7,159,839	
Change in net position	\$ 31,193	0.43%

Commissioners AND Alternates



An autumn Lake Superior view from Presque Isle Park in Marquette, Michigan.

New York

Basil Seggos, New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation

Kisha Santiago-Martinez, New York State Dept. of State

James M. Tierney, New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation

New York Alternates

Sean Mahar, New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation

Katie Petronis, New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation

Ohio

Mary Mertz, Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources

Hon. Haraz N. Ghanbari, State Representative

Hon. Theresa Gavarone, State Senator

Anne M. Vogel, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

James H. I. Weakley, Lake Carriers' Association

Ohio Alternates

John D. Baker, International Longshoremen's Association

Mindy Bankey, Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources

Tiffani Kavalec, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

Debra DiCianna, Lake Carriers' Association



Québec City, Québec, on the St. Lawrence River.

Illinois

Loren Wobig, Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources

Stephanie Comer, Comer Family Foundation

John J. Kim, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

Yu-Feng Forrest Lin, Illinois Water Resources Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Josina Morita, Cook County Commissioner

Indiana

Sharon Jackson, Office of the Governor of Indiana

Steven A. Fisher, American Great Lakes Ports Association

Kay L. Nelson, Northwest Indiana Forum

Brian Rockensuess, Indiana Dept. of Environmental Management

Chris Smith, Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources

Indiana Alternates

Ryan Mueller, Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources

Jody W. Peacock, Ports of Indiana

**As of December 2023.
Delegation chairs are in bold.**

Michigan

James Clift, Michigan Dept. of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy

Hon. Candice Miller, Macomb County Public Works

Hon. Dana Nessel, Michigan Attorney General

Marc E. Smith, National Wildlife Federation

Michigan Alternates

Kara Cook, Michigan Dept. of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy

S. Peter Manning, Michigan Dept. of the Attorney General

Jennifer McKay, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council

Minnesota

Katrina Kessler, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Hon. Karin Housley, State Senator

Hon. Alicia Kozlowski, State Representative

Hon. Ann Rest, State Senator

Hon. Paul Torkelson, State Representative

Minnesota Alternates

Deb DeLuca, Duluth Seaway Port Authority

Peter Tester, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency



Ontario

Earl Provost, Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade

Craig Brown, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry

Jonathan Lebi, Ministry of Transportation

Chloe Stuart, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

Ontario Alternates

Jennifer Keyes, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry

Leo Luong, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

Greg Malczewski, Ministry of Transportation

Basia Puskar, Ontario Cabinet Office

Cale Selby, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Pennsylvania

Timothy J. Bruno, Pennsylvania Dept. of Environmental Protection

Hon. Patrick J. Harkins, State Representative

Québec

Jean-François Hould, Québec Government Office in Chicago

Grégory Cloutier, Ministère des Transports

Vincent Gagnon-Lefebvre, Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques

Guillaume Dubreuil, Groupe CSL

Québec Alternates

Kerith Brand, Québec Government Office in Chicago

Geneviève Désy, Ministère des Transports

Alexis Bédard-Fiset, Ministère des Relations internationales et de la Francophonie

Frederic Lecomte, Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs

Nicole Trépanier, Fednav Limited

Wisconsin

Todd L. Ambs, Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources (retired)

Melonee Montano, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission

Wade Strickland, Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources

Wisconsin Alternates

Dean Haen, Port of Green Bay

GLC Staff

Left to right, back row: Eric Brown, Tom Crane. Middle row: Connor Roessler, James Polidori, Amanda Grimm, Nicole Zacharda, Joe Bertram, Ceci Weibert, Don Leflouria Jr., Jill Estrada, Kate Truitt, Laura Andrews. Front row: Theresa Gruninger, Hannah Reynolds, Erika Jensen, Taaja Tucker-Silva, Samantha Tank, Beth Wanamaker. Not pictured: Nichole Angell. Staff as of December 2023.

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Alibi Marina in Fish Creek, Wisconsin, on Lake Michigan's Green Bay.

About *THE* Great Lakes Commission

The Great Lakes Commission is a binational government agency established in 1955 to protect the Great Lakes and the economies and ecosystems they support.

Its membership includes leaders from the eight U.S. states and two Canadian provinces in the Great Lakes basin. The GLC recommends policies and practices to balance the use, development, and conservation of the water resources of the Great Lakes and brings the region together to work on issues that no single community, state, province, or nation can tackle alone.