

DECIDING THE FATE OF THE GREAT LAKES

3 Time to Act

Secure the Future of Great Lakes Water

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EVEN THE GRANDEST OF RESOURCES CAN DRY UP, blow away, or fall to misuse. Consider the vivid example of the Lumber Baron era and its 19th-century disregard for seemingly endless natural resources. Rampant clearcutting devastated entire ecosystems and left Great Lakes communities with barren land and depressed economies.

The recipe for such disaster — surging demand and unlimited access — is at work today in global water markets, where solutions to water scarcity center on selling and moving water from place to place instead of conserving and managing supplies for long-term water security. Proposals for exporting Great Lakes water, along with previously unthinkable groundwater

shortages in many Great Lakes communities, now are showing the region's citizens and leaders how precious and vulnerable their water is.

Protections from export plans and unrestrained water use, however, are weak or nonexistent in the Great Lakes. That must change if farms, cities, and families hope to have enough water in the future. Per capita water consumption in the United States is more than four times higher than the global average. Water waste, along with pollution's contamination of available supplies, now jeopardizes important public resources, such as the Great Lakes system of interrelated aquifers, streams, and lakes.

Time to Act

In 2001 Great Lakes governments took the first step toward protecting the region's water from misuse when they signed the Great Lakes Charter Annex. The unprecedented agreement promises to enhance the basin's economy and aquatic habitats with practical water use.

But state and provincial leaders must turn these visionary principles into concrete and binding standards before they actu-



Freighter on the St. Lawrence Seaway.

ally will protect the basin's water for the future. Leaders have committed to doing so by 2004. Meeting that deadline may be the region's last chance to protect Great Lakes water forever.

The Need for New Protections

Many legal experts agree that current laws designed to protect the Great Lakes are limited. Under these laws, the region's governments, they suggest, cannot respond to massive export plans by simply banning proposals to ship water from the basin.

Powerful international trade agreements may require Great Lakes states and provinces to treat requests that involve shipping water outside the basin the same as they treat local and regional withdrawals that keep water in the basin. In that case, all regulation of water withdrawals would need to apply equally to all users, whether that's a proposal for building a water pipeline from Lake Michigan to the arid southwest or a power plant cooling intake in the basin that draws water from Lake Erie.

The solution is a regional system of standards that requires all users to protect and enhance the basin's unique and inter-related system of water resources. Such standards can provide a fair and legally defensible regulatory foundation for Great Lakes communities — and make large-scale exports virtually impossible.

Great Lakes Charter Annex

The Great Lakes Charter Annex is the cornerstone of this regulatory foundation with its goal of basin-wide standards by which

the region's governments can judge all new or increased water withdrawals. The standards will be based on three key principles:

- Every new project must include all reasonably feasible water conservation measures.
- No new project can cause significant harm — individually or in combination with other projects — to the Great Lakes, their tributaries, or the people and wildlife they support.
- Every project must be designed to actually improve the Great Lakes and their tributary lakes, streams, and underground aquifers. Avoiding harm is not enough.

Next Steps

The challenge now is for the region's governments to turn the amendment's non-binding principles into legal standards:

- The governors and premiers must develop comprehensive and enforceable standards to manage Great Lakes water effectively.
- State and provincial lawmakers also must enact legislation that puts these basin-wide standards into practice at home.
- This bi-national process may also require approval from the U.S. Congress and Canadian Parliament.
- The public must have the opportunity to participate in development of standards.

Thinking Ahead

Only by example and by consistent application of comprehensive standards can the region's leaders, citizens, and businesses set the rules of the region's water future. ■

ACTION STEPS

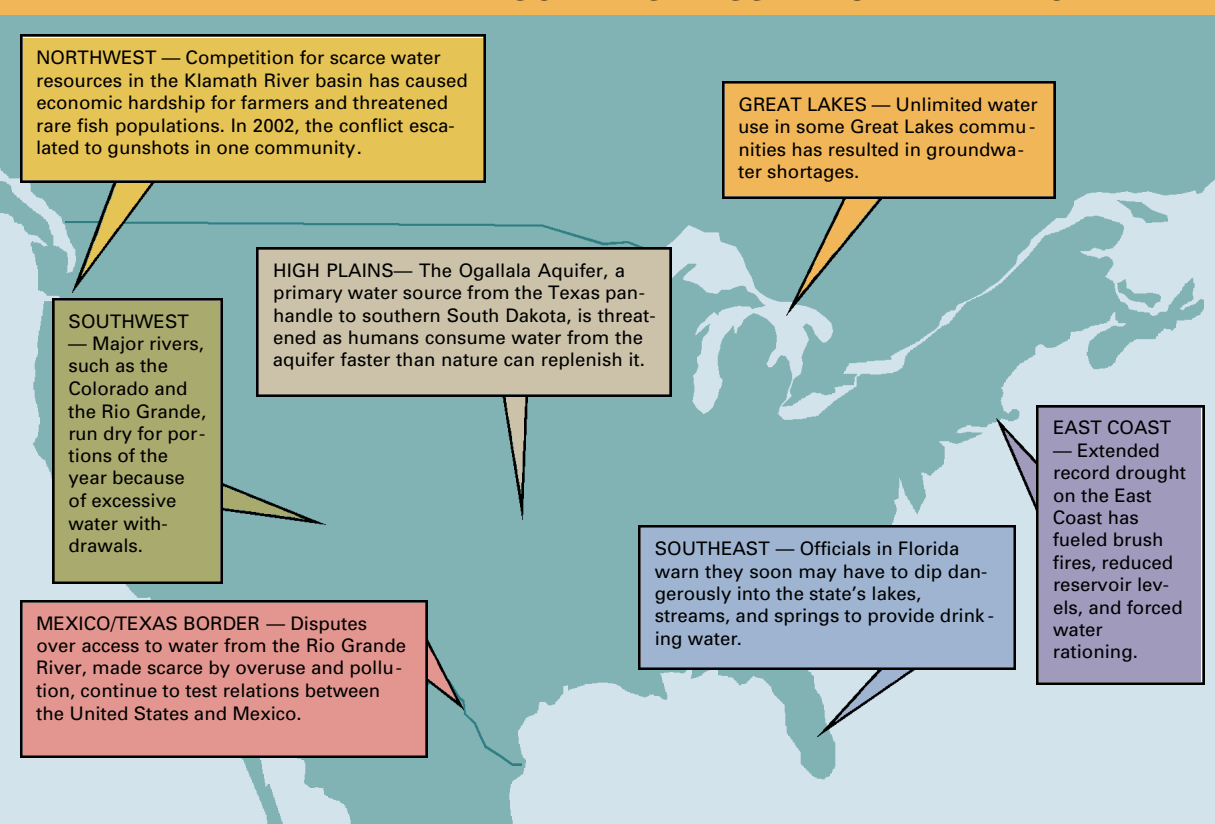
Great Lakes governments now are negotiating a common strategy to implement the Great Lakes Charter Annex, and protect all water users — from farms and cities to fish and forests. To develop a truly effective plan, leaders must:

- **LAY DOWN THE LAW.** Turn general principals for protecting Great Lakes water into enforceable law with no loopholes.
- **PROTECT IT ALL.** Protections should apply to the entire freshwater system, including groundwater and small streams that feed the Great Lakes.
- **SEEK PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.** States and provinces must involve citizens, businesses, and communities in decisions that affect their freshwater resources.

BASIN-WIDE PARTNERS

- Environmental Advocates of New York
- Great Lakes United
- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
- Lake Michigan Federation
- Michigan Environmental Council
- Michigan Land Use Institute
- National Wildlife Federation
- Ohio Environmental Council
- Wisconsin's Environmental Decade

WATER SUPPLY STRESS IN NORTH AMERICA



Depleted water supplies, diversion proposals, and damaged ecosystems already fuel protests and conflicts on many continents, including North America. The problem is that overuse and water pollution continue even as global water consumption doubles every 20 years — more than twice the rate of human population growth.



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