



ACTION PLAN 2020-2030 TO PROTECT THE GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE

Leading Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Advocates Call for 10-year, \$2.2B Strategy

What is Action Plan 2020-2030?

The Action Plan to Protect the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence 2020-2030 (Action Plan 2020-2030) is a 10-year, \$2.2 billion strategy to protect the economy and ecology of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River, addressing shoreline erosion, outdated infrastructure, invasive species, exposure to toxins, and beach contamination.

Climate Change has produced high-water levels and devastating storm events that flood coastal communities, erode shorelines, and overwhelm outdated infrastructure. Action Plan 2020-2030 recognizes the similar and disparate solutions required to address Great Lakes and St. Lawrence issues and recommends an approach adapted to those specific needs. The Plan integrates the findings of two foundational reports, the Great Lakes Action Plan 2030 and the Action Plan for the future of the Saint Lawrence 2020-2030.

To address the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, governments are anticipated to adopt major economic stimulus and job-creation programs. The recommendations in Action Plan 2020-2030 not only provide significant environmental benefits, they are an effective investment strategy to create jobs and reignite the economy of a region home to one in three Canadians.

What will Action Plan 2020-2030 Achieve?

- **Protect and build resiliency in Great Lakes and St. Lawrence shoreline communities** and ecosystems that are most vulnerable to high water levels and erosion, through new collaborative partnerships, direct financial and technical assistance, with a strong emphasis on naturalizing shorelines.
- **Reduce human and environmental exposure to toxics** and other harmful chemicals in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence region through a proactive surveillance program that actively seeks out impacts on people and species and engages affected communities in the monitoring and response to exposure.
- **Reduce agricultural nutrient runoff** that causes harmful algal blooms, eutrophication, and hypoxia by using new technologies and conservation measures and harnessing big data to target areas and properties that contribute the most.

- **Introduce enforceable requirements to trace and address sources of bacteriological contamination at beaches** that pose a public health threat and reduce access to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence shorelines and beaches.
- **Upgrade treatment and capacity of wastewater treatment plants** to effectively remove emerging contaminants, total nitrogen, and pathogens in select areas.

Recommendations

In addition to the 27-recommendation made in the first two reports (12 for the St. Lawrence and 15 for the Great Lakes) Action Plan 2020-2030 proposes three final recommendations for a total of 30 recommendations that Federal and Provincial governments can implement to improve the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence over the next ten years. The three recommendations in this report are:

1. It is recommended that the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the Governments of Quebec and Ontario, establish the institutional arrangements outlines in this report. The arrangements will be freestanding but may be integrated into the Canada Agency once it is established.

It is further recommended that the Government of Canada request that the federal Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development undertake a performance audit of Action Plan 2020-2030 every 2-3 years and report its findings to Parliament.

2. It is recommended that the Government of Canada commit to invest \$2.2 billion over the next ten years to implement the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Action Plan 2020-2030, guided by the implementation roll-out and investment strategy in this report, and seek shared funding arrangements where appropriate from the Governments of Quebec and Ontario and municipalities.
3. It is recommended that the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Collaborative Commission regularly review progress towards desired outcomes, consider adapting recommended actions to changing circumstances, and recommend new issues to add to the Action Plan, including biodiversity, nuclear operations and waste, and road salts.

Governance

The existing fractured and under-resourced institutional arrangements are inadequate to address the problems faced by the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence ecoregion due to pollution and Climate Change. Action Plan 2020-2030 recommends a multi-jurisdictional approach where governments coordinate with stakeholders and municipalities to create the government structure necessary to address local concerns.

Action Plan 2020-2030 recommends collecting and using data to adopt a risk-based targeting approach, prioritizing intervention where data shows we can deliver the most cost-efficient and impactful results. Academic institutions, research centres, and outreach and extension professionals possess tremendous knowledge and expertise but lack the coordination with local communities, agricultural enterprises and small businesses needed to provide technical assistance. The Action Plan calls for harnessing these centres of knowledge to produce purpose-oriented research and innovation, train researchers and technical outreach professionals, and provide locally relevant technical advice and outreach.

To measure and maintain success, programs must be regularly monitored and evaluated based on target outcomes. The Action Plan calls for annual reports submitted by implementation teams to the GLSL Commission, annual reports submitted by the GLSL Commission to the federal government, a bi-annual meeting of stakeholders, governments organizations and First Nations organised by the GLSL Commission and periodic auditing to ensure public accountability.

The Process

The Great Lakes St. Lawrence Collaborative developed Action Plan 2020-2030 over eighteen months with funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada. The Collaborative consists of five leading Great Lakes and St. Lawrence advocacy organisations, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, the Council of the Great Lakes Region, Freshwater Future Canada, and Stratégies Saint Laurent, and engaged First Nations, economic, NGO, and academic stakeholders in intense reflection and consultation on ways to modernize and innovate protection in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence.

Action Plan 2020-2030 was directed by an Expert Panel, cochaired by two esteemed environmental experts, Gord Miller, former environment commissioner of Ontario, and Jean Cinq-Mars, former Commissioner of Sustainable Development for Quebec. In total, over 200 experts, stakeholders and indigenous representatives were consulted in the development of Action Plan 2020-2030. The Expert Panel was supported by a Secretariat led by Westbrook Public Affairs in Toronto and by Ecogestion Solutions during the St. Lawrence phase of the process.

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Collaborative / Collaboratif Grands Lacs Saint Laurent

