

# Ontario Freshwater Priorities

## *Ontario's Fresh Waters Need Targets, Timelines, and Investments*

As a province, we are stewards of close to a quarter of Earth's available surface fresh water, and have a responsibility to take action to ensure fresh water protection and restoration. As such, the undersigned individuals and organizations believe clear commitments are necessary to protect and restore the fresh waters of our province.

## *We Need to Protect and Restore Ontario's Waters*

The lakes, rivers, and streams of Ontario's watersheds are sources of our drinking water and support our commercial and recreational activities. Wetlands are important features providing valuable ecological services, including water filtration and flood protection. The waters of the Great Lakes alone supplies drinking water to almost 80% of Ontarians. And, as a region, the Great Lakes - St Lawrence River provinces and states have a GDP of USD \$5.8 trillion, or roughly 28% of combined U.S. and Canadian economic activity. In particular, recreational anglers contribute more than \$600 million to Ontario's economy and Lake Erie's \$240 million commercial fishery is one of the largest in the world.

Indigenous communities are spiritually and culturally connected with water. Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution protects the rights of indigenous peoples to fishing, hunting, farming and trading, and spiritual grounding - all of which require clean, fresh water.

## *Ontario's Waters Are Threatened*

Despite the importance of fresh water, we are experiencing ongoing threats, which are exacerbated by climate change and population pressures. The financial impacts of flooding in particular are significant. The Insurance Bureau of Canada reported that property damage caused by the 2013 storm that swamped the GTA was more than \$850 million. Additionally, one-third of Ontarians and 98% of rural Ontario rely on non-municipal water systems, and are therefore particularly vulnerable to threats to their drinking water.

Other threats include:

- Algae outbreaks in Lake Erie have compromised drinking water sources, clogged water intake pipes, impeded recreational uses, degraded aquatic habitat, and threatened fish populations.
- Chemical pollution from sources such as pesticides, industrial and municipal effluent, and toxic chemicals are an increasing concern for human and ecological health. For example, endocrine disrupting substances that are found in some pesticides, plastics, flame retardants, and fragrances can negatively impact reproduction and brain function in people and animals, and increase the risk of some cancers.
- Invasive species disrupt the aquatic food web and push out native species. If Asian carp establish themselves in the Great Lakes - St Lawrence River Basin, the likely result will be significant declines in the industries and jobs that depend on recreational boaters.

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## *What Needs To Be Done*

Given the importance of fresh water and the ongoing threats, we believe the following commitments need to be made.

Protect drinking water by:

- Eliminating all long-standing boil water advisories and persistent drinking water quality violations and ensuring drinking water source protection for all Ontarians by 2022
- Reaffirming the target of a 40% reduction in total and dissolved reactive phosphorus in Lake Erie by 2025; with an interim goal of 20% by 2020

Protect habitats and biodiversity by:

- Protecting 17% of Ontario's lands and fresh waters by 2020, in accordance with Canada's commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity
- Protecting and restoring wetlands to move us toward reversing wetland loss by 2022, by making provincially significant wetlands, Hudson Bay Lowlands, Great Lakes coastal wetlands (and other wetland types of high ecological value) strictly off limits to development, and by committing to stronger programs to scale up wetland restoration
- Reviewing, integrating, and managing substances that are harmful to aquatic life, including chloride pollution from the application of road salts

Protect beaches, lakes, and rivers by:

- Preventing nuisance algae by reducing overall emissions of nutrient pollutants to water from Ontario industries and municipalities as reported to the National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) by 40% by 2028 compared to the 2015 reporting year
- Ensuring real-time, public notification of sewage spills, including combined sewage overflow (CSO) events, in all municipalities, and eliminating the release of inadequately or untreated sewage by 2022
- Supporting implementation of agricultural best management practices to manage the impacts of nutrients on water quality

Protect homes and businesses from flooding by:

- Ensuring all municipalities achieve tree canopy targets by 2030
- Dedicating 15% of infrastructure funds to implementing living green infrastructure
- Assessing the extent of flood vulnerabilities through watershed and shoreline studies

Protect fish and other aquatic life by:

- Reducing overall emissions of carcinogens and other toxic (persistent, bioaccumulative, and endocrine disrupting) chemicals in industrial and municipal wastewaters as reported to the National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) by 25% by 2022 compared to the 2015 reporting year, with a plan to move to virtual elimination of such emissions by 2030

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- Preventing invasive species, such as Asian carp, from taking hold in Ontario and stepping up efforts to knock back invasive species that have already taken hold, including phragmites and the round goby

In addition to making clear commitments with targets and timelines, we believe that adequate resources must be dedicated to accomplishing the task.

Water is crucially important to the health of Ontario's people, wildlife, ecosystems, and economy. Clear commitments, targets with timelines, and investments are needed. We will be looking for significant progress toward protection and restoration of fresh waters in Ontario, particularly within the Great Lakes - St Lawrence River Basin.

Sincerely,

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