2023 Canadian Federal Priorities for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin

March 2023

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative calls on the Canadian federal government to support the following priorities in order to ensure the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin remains a vibrant place to live, work and play. Founded in 2003, the Cities Initiative is a binational coalition of more than 230 Canadian and U.S. mayors and local elected leaders dedicated to promoting the environmental and socioeconomic health of communities across the basin. For more information, please contact Phil Murphy-Rhéaume, Canada Policy Director, at phillipe.murphy-rheaume@glslcities.org.

Invest in a Freshwater Action Plan that Will Advance Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin Stewardship

- Accelerate increases in funding for the Freshwater Action Plan with a $1 billion investment over five years from the ten-year investment promised during the last federal election. Since the last election, only $19.6 million was invested in the Freshwater Action Plan in Budget 2022
- Ensure that increased funding for the Freshwater Action Plan leads to significant investments in community-led initiatives in the basin, such as the Great Lakes Protection Initiative and the “Programme interactions communautaires” of the St. Lawrence Action Plan, and make municipalities eligible for these initiatives

Implement an Independent Canada Water Agency That Will Support the Long-Term Viability of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin and the Communities It Sustains

- Ensure that the basin has targeted programming under the Canada Water Agency’s mandate and that the agency is headquartered in the basin
- Create a Water Quality and Nutrient Management Centre under the Canada Water Agency that leverages data to support enhanced precision conservation and stormwater optimization practices
- Lead research and provide recommendations to federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments on ways to accelerate approvals for freshwater-based projects that will improve water quality (e.g., re-naturalizing shorelines)
- Ensure municipalities in the basin have a voice in the ongoing development and implementation of Canada Water Agency activities by exploring a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

Enable Municipalities to Provide Safe and Affordable Water for Their Communities

- Relaunch a dedicated funding program for water infrastructure, such as the short-lived Clean Water and Wastewater Fund, with a focus on phasing out combined sewers and modernizing water lines and treatment facilities that are adaptive to a changing climate and able to address persistent and emerging pollutants (e.g., untreated sewage, phosphorous, microplastics/fibres, PFAS/PFOA, etc.) that adversely impact water quality
- Convene federal, provincial, territorial and municipal officials to identify potential revenue mechanisms that will provide dedicated, predictable and sustained funding to municipalities for water-infrastructure projects and maintenance, as well as exploring funding alternatives to the gas tax as Canadians increasingly switch to electric vehicles to ensure the Canadian Community Building Fund remains fully funded
Leverage Federal Resources and Tools to Support Climate Adaptation for Coastal Communities

- Work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – along with Canadian federal, provincial, municipal, First Nations officials and environmental organizations – to conduct a basin-wide coastal resiliency study that will provide legislative and funding recommendations for accelerating the protection of shorelines along the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River
- Reinstate a federal shoreline protection funding program with a $100 million investment per year over ten years to address critical erosion and shoreline flooding issues in the basin
- Renew the Natural Infrastructure Fund with $250 million per year in funding over the next five years and include planning and capacity-building projects as part of this renewed program’s scope
- Advance a federally-funded Green Infrastructure Centre of Excellence to support municipalities and other key actors in accessing technical guidance, best practices and resources to support the implementation of natural and hybrid infrastructure solutions along their shorelines
- Support the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative’s Resilient Coastal Projects Initiative Canadian pilot through $500,000 in funding to help build up shoreline resilience and adaptation capacity for small and medium-sized municipalities, along with First Nations communities, in the basin

Address Nuisances and Pollutants Affecting the Quality of Our Precious Freshwater Resources

- Invest $200 million to create a Swimmable Water Action Plan, in collaboration with the Ontario and Quebec governments, that will support the opening and uninterrupted operation of clean beaches in the basin
- Address the issue of microfibre-based microplastics by launching a Microfibre Reduction Strategy, including additional research into solutions to address the problem of microfibre pollution, developing and sharing educational materials for Canadians to reduce their microfibre emissions and requiring that all laundry washing machines be outfitted with a mesh filter 100 microns or smaller within five years
- Formally acknowledge the triggers of nuisance algal blooms (e.g., *Cladophora*) and develop and implement phosphorous reduction and algae mitigation strategies for all Great Lakes
- Relaunch the Zero Plastic Waste Initiative to help identify and promote innovative, low-cost solutions to capture and remove plastic litter from the environment, including in the basin
- Ban unencapsulated polystyrene products in all new and replacement public and private docks and floating structures across Canada, as is being implemented in Ontario, to prevent the breakdown and dispersion of this plastic foam into our waters
- End the practice of issuing vessel licenses for floating cottages by Transport Canada and rescind all such licenses that have been issued