

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**New Fund to Support Economic Growth, Clean Water and Community Resilience
Across Ontario's Fresh Coast Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Region**

TORONTO, ON — May 7, 2026 — The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative / Alliance des villes des Grands Lacs et du Saint-Laurent (Cities Initiative) is pleased to announce the launch of the Local Blue Economy Growth Fund, made possible with funding from the Government of Ontario. This program will lay the foundation for advancing the Cities Initiative's Economic Transformation Action Plan to build a stronger and more resilient Fresh Coast Economic Corridor, from Lake Superior to the St. Lawrence.

The Honourable Todd McCarthy, Ontario's Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, announced the fund at the Cities Initiative's 2026 Annual Conference in Hamilton.

The Local Blue Economy Growth Fund will support Ontario municipalities and First Nations communities that are members of the Cities Initiative in advancing projects that strengthen local economies by improving water quality, enhancing climate resilience, and supporting the adoption of innovative water technologies and sustainable stormwater and wastewater infrastructure.

"The Local Blue Economy Growth Fund is a meaningful investment in Ontario communities that will help improve water quality while supporting innovation across Ontario's water technology sector," said Mat Siscoe, Mayor of St. Catharines and Co-Chair of the Cities Initiative. "By making it easier for municipalities and First Nations communities to adopt emerging stormwater and wastewater solutions, this fund demonstrates how economic growth and environmental protection can go hand in hand, delivering real benefits for residents while helping us build a strong Fresh Coast Economic Corridor."

"Ontario is proud to support the Cities Initiative to implement local, high-impact projects that will protect vital resources and improve community resilience to extreme weather," said Todd McCarthy, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. "This investment empowers municipalities and First Nations to put innovative water solutions in place – safeguarding their communities against major flooding events and ensuring these vital waterways remain healthy for generations to come."

Communities across Ontario are facing increasing challenges related to water quality and infrastructure capacity. Extreme weather events, population growth, and legacy and emerging contaminants are placing added pressure on stormwater and wastewater systems.

Through this fund, the Cities Initiative will support practical solutions that address these challenges while contributing to the growth of Ontario's Fresh Coast economy through the adoption of innovative water technology solutions. The program will distribute \$1 million in total funding through two intake periods, with individual grants of up to \$50,000, supporting up to 40 projects across the province.

Projects supported through the Local Blue Economy Growth Fund are expected to reduce pollution, improve water quality, and strengthen community climate resilience, while contributing to the growth of Ontario's Fresh Coast Economic Corridor. In addition to funding projects, the Cities Initiative will host several events to showcase innovations supported by the fund and share best practices across jurisdictions and sectors.

Ontario's Great Lakes provide more than 80 percent of the province's drinking water and are key to economic prosperity. Almost 50 percent of Canada's manufacturing, along with 83 percent of Ontario's

power generation and 95 percent of Ontario’s agricultural lands depend on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin. Protecting this resource is critical to the environmental, economic, and social well-being of communities across the region.

Additional Information

- The first intake period of the Local Blue Economy Growth Fund opens May 7, 2026, and closes at 5 p.m. on June 19, 2026. An informational webinar on the program will be held on May 28, 2026.
- Eligible projects must align with one or more of the following priority areas:
 - Pollution capture and contaminant removal
 - Stormwater and wastewater treatment and filtration
 - Smart and innovative technology solutions for stormwater management
 - Circular economy and resource recovery practices
 - Nature-based and green stormwater infrastructure
- More information about the Local Blue Economy Growth Fund is available at: <https://glslcities.org/lbegf>
- Learn more about the Cities Initiative’s Economic Transformation Action Plan to build the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor: <https://glslcities.org/etap/>

About the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a multinational coalition of municipal and Indigenous government executives representing communities in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region who are working to promote economic prosperity in our communities and protect our fresh water for the benefit of current and future generations. With more than 425 communities represented, the Cities Initiative is leading the way in advancing the environmental, economic, and social health of the region by addressing issues impacting its residents. The Cities Initiative is comprised of a U.S. organization and a Canadian organization. In September 2025, the Cities Initiative launched its *Economic Transformation Action Plan: A Blueprint for Economic Growth* and Freshwater Stewardship in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region.

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