

2026 Canadian Federal Priorities for Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region Communities

January 2026

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative calls on the Government of Canada to support the following priorities to safeguard the economic prosperity and environmental health of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region communities:

Build the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor in the Great Lake and St. Lawrence River Region

- Preserve the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement and use the 2026 Joint Review to reaffirm and further operationalize provisions on supply-chain resiliency (Chapters 2 and 14) and the North American Competitiveness Committee (Chapter 26), reinforcing a strong Canada-U.S. trade relationship and our \$12-trillion Great Lakes regional economy
- Partner with municipalities and First Nations to attract half a million new businesses to our region over the next decade with an emphasis on strategic, innovative and water-intensive industries, continuing the region's proud legacy of manufacturing while safeguarding the health of our lakes and rivers
- Support the cross-border resiliency of key manufacturing and resource industries in North America – including steel, aluminium, auto manufacturing and critical minerals – to promote our region's economic security amid trade uncertainty
- Leverage the multinational network of the Cities Initiative to mitigate the impacts of the tariffs on Canadian businesses and communities, advocate for tariff relief and strengthen the long-term stability of the Canada-U.S. trade relationship

Expand Maritime Commerce on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway

- Advance a unified federal supply-chain strategy for the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Maritime Corridor by prioritizing our region within the \$5-billion Trade Diversification Corridors Fund, directing investments to marine ports, inland container terminals, rail hubs and multimodal connections
- Accelerate Canada Border Services Agency modernization – including by expanding Canadian container-clearance capacity at Québec City and Hamilton – and evaluating future sites – such as Windsor, Port Colborne and Picton – with the aim of strengthening resilience to trade disruptions
- Accelerate port and vessel electrification and the adoption of clean marine fuels across the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Seaway, working with municipalities and industry to reduce emissions, improve air and water quality and deliver health and environmental benefits for waterfront communities
- Support a coordinated, long-term North American approach to shipbuilding and fleet modernization that strengthens maritime industrial capacity, advances clean vessel technologies and enhances the resilience and competitiveness of shared marine supply chains
- Support Canada's vision for a blue economy by implementing regulatory modernization and investing in the Seaway, recognizing freshwater ports and marine supply chains as nationally strategic economic assets

Strengthen Freshwater Communities and Protect Our Precious Freshwater Resources

- Establish a dedicated water and wastewater program delivered through the Build Communities Strong Fund that prioritizes municipalities and First Nations and is coordinated with the Trade Diversification Corridors Fund to align local water infrastructure upgrades with nationally significant supply chain and trade corridor investments
- Build on the historic C\$650-million investment in the Freshwater Action Plan – including C\$420 million for the Great Lakes – by fully implementing a Municipal Stream under the Freshwater Action Plan and the \$100-million Strategic Water Security Technology Fund to drive local economic activity, support fishing and hunting for livelihoods and subsistence and equip communities with the tools needed to advance water innovation over the next decade in close partnership with local governments
- Protect funding for the Canada Water Agency’s core work in freshwater science, program delivery and the modernization of the Canada Water Act, ensuring the Agency can continue to provide national coordination, evidence-based policy support and technical assistance to municipalities, First Nations and partners
- Enact federal legislation that defines water, source water, drinking water, wastewater and related infrastructure on, in and under First Nation land, establish enforceable standards to uphold treaty rights of First Nations and guarantee access to clean, safe and affordable water to all Canadian residents
- Designate microplastics as a “chemical of mutual concern” under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement given their prevalence in our region’s lakes and rivers
- Fully fund and target region-wide aquatic invasive species prevention and control efforts, including a dedicated share of the federal \$10-million investment for high-risk corridors to support enforcement, rapid response and cross-border coordination
- Include and increase funding for the Canada-Québec Agreement on the St. Lawrence as part of its 2026–2041 renewal, noting that federal contributions have not increased in over 15 years despite growing environmental pressures on this nationally significant river system

Protect Communities, Businesses and Housing from Extreme Weather

- Scale up long-term federal investments in disaster resilience by implementing Climate Proof Canada coalition recommendations – including a \$2-billion top-up to the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund in 2026 followed by at least \$1 billion annually alongside strengthened flood-risk mapping, freshwater coastal erosion expertise and the establishment of a national flood-insurance program – to protect homes, maintain mortgage access and reduce long-term disaster costs
- Reinstate the federal funding for shoreline erosion infrastructure – as was unanimously recommended by the TRAN Committee in Fall 2024 – to support critical projects to protect communities along Canada’s freshwater coasts
- Harness private capital to enhance resilience funding by tasking government agencies with developing innovative funding models that leverage partnerships with the private sector

About the Cities Initiative

The 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 and protect our fresh water for the benefit of current and future generations. For more information, please contact Gabriel Alves at galves@glslicities.org.