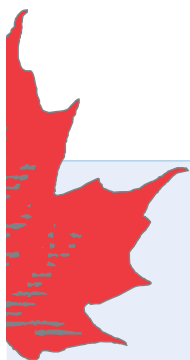


U.S. Blue Communities in the Great Lakes Basin

Make your Great Lakes community a Blue Community!





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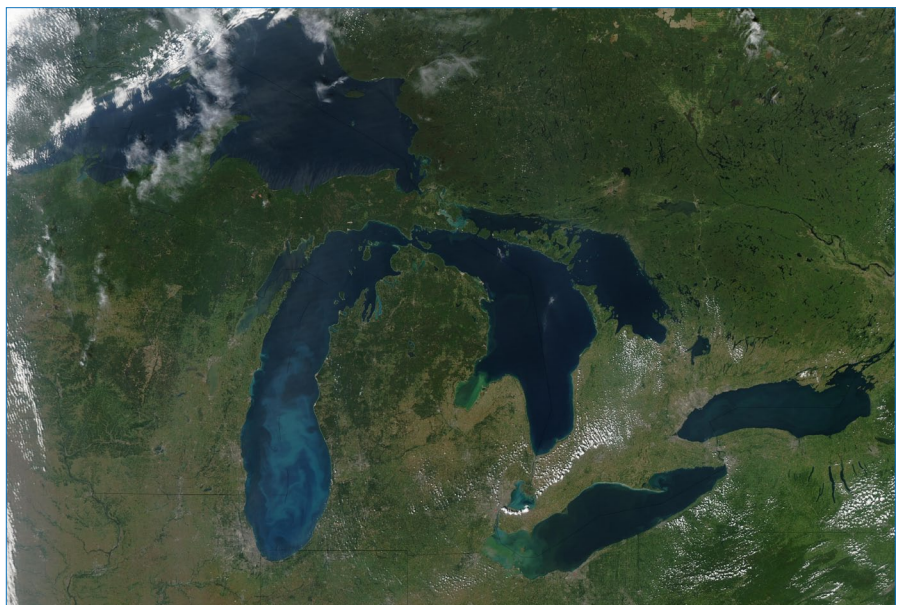
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U.S. Blue Communities in the Great Lakes Basin

The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin form the largest system of freshwater lakes and rivers in the world, holding more than 20 per cent of the Earth's surface freshwater and 95 per cent of North America's.

Yet the 21st century brings a new wave of acute and chronic threats to the waters of the Great Lakes Basin. Once thought to be immune from the water crisis that threatens other parts of the world, the Great Lakes are a source of increasing concern as residents watch their shorelines recede, beaches and harbors close, drinking water diminish, and their fisheries decline. The Great Lakes ecosystem is suffering from over-extraction of resources, climate change, pollution, nutrient runoff, wetland loss, mining, oil and gas extraction, excessive water withdrawals and diversions that are draining or undermining the integrity of the Lakes. Despite past protection and water management standards, these threats have intensified and multiplied. A new understanding and overarching framework is needed.

Eight U.S. states: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York border the Lakes. Two Canadian provinces – Ontario and Quebec – border the lakes and the St. Lawrence River, which is their primary flow outlet to the Atlantic Ocean. As well, there are many Indigenous territories with governance and treaty rights. Recognizing that while there are many political jurisdictions governing the Great Lakes Basin, it is, in fact, one integrated watershed and needs to be seen and governed as such.



MODIS image of the Great Lakes by NOAA Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory via Flickr. CC-by-sa 2.0

Since 2008, community groups, water advocates and residents have been working to designate the Great Lakes and its tributary waters as a lived Commons, to be shared, protected, carefully managed and enjoyed by all who live around them. The Basin needs to be protected by a legal, policy, scientific, and political framework based on the principles of the Public Trust Doctrine. Public trust principles are recognized in some fashion by all eight states and two provinces that surround the Great Lakes. The public trust underpins the legal background of the waters of the Great Lakes, which are central to the very existence of those people, plants and animals living on or near them, and therefore must be protected for the common good from generation to generation.

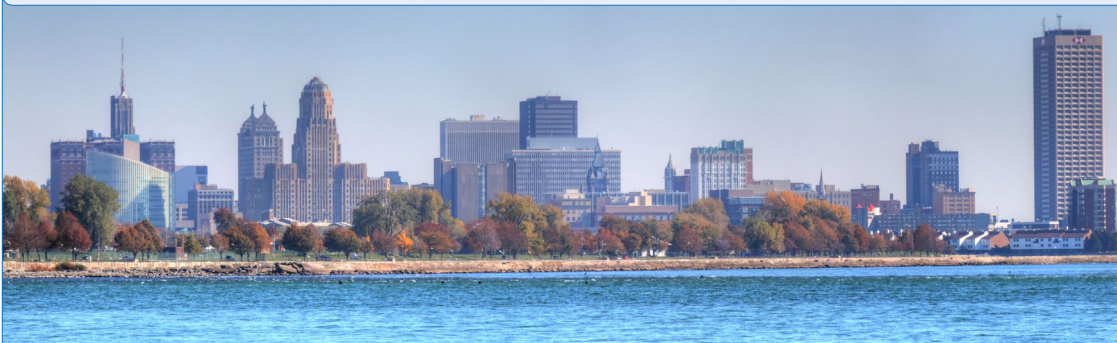
It is now more important than ever for all of us to take steps to protect our water sources, streams, lakes, and related ecosystems as well as water and wastewater services. By making your Great Lakes community a Blue Community, you can do your part to ensure clean, safe water sources and reliable public services for generations to come.

THE BLUE COMMUNITIES PROJECT

The Blue Communities Project began in Canada as a joint initiative of the Blue Planet Project, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Council of Canadians. This project builds on nearly two decades of coalition work with local and national groups to protect and promote public water.



This guide will help community activists and local leaders in communities around the Great Lakes to protect the water commons – shared water resources – in the face of increasing pressure to put water up for sale and privatize water services. Public sector workers, elected representatives and community activists can all pursue the creation of a “Blue Community” and become part of a growing movement for public water around the world.



“Buffalo Skyline” by Jake Haggmark via Flickr. CC-by-nc-sa 2.0

Making your Great Lakes community a Blue Community

A “Blue Community” is one that adopts a water commons framework by taking the four actions outlined in this guide. Adopting a water commons framework is an important step towards governing water as a commons and public trust.

A water commons framework treats water as a common good that is shared by everyone and the responsibility of all. Because water is essential for human life, it must be governed by public trust stewardship and other commons principles that allow for reasonable use, protective backdrop principles, equal distribution, and responsible respect and treatment in order to preserve water for nature and future generations.

The Blue Communities Project calls on U.S. municipalities to adopt a water commons framework by:

1. Recognizing the public trust that protects the waters and community uses of the Great Lakes.
2. Recognizing water and sanitation as human rights and water as a commons.
3. Banning or phasing out the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities and at municipal events.
4. Promoting publicly financed, owned, and operated safe water and wastewater infrastructure and services.



“TARP Thornton Reservoir Connecting Tunnel” by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago via Flickr. CC by-nc 2.0

SAMPLE RESOLUTION – RECOGNIZING THE PUBLIC TRUST THAT PROTECTS THE WATERS OF THE GREAT LAKES

WHEREAS the human rights to water and sanitation and the right to human health are recognized by the United Nations and the right to health has been protected by the courts under the United States Constitution;

WHEREAS, waters of the Great Lakes Basin are recognized as a precious water resource held in public trust, meaning water is central to the very existence, health, and sustenance of people, plants and animals living on or near them and therefore must be protected for the common good from generation to generation; and

WHEREAS, the Great Lakes represent 20% of the planet’s surface freshwater and 95% of the surface freshwater in the United States and is only 1% renewable; and

WHEREAS, the waters and bottomlands of the Great Lakes are held in trust by the eight Great Lake states for use and enjoyment by its current and future citizens. The states, as trustees, have a perpetual responsibility to the public, as beneficiaries, to manage these bottomlands and waters for the prevention of pollution, diminishment, or impairment for the protection of the water, natural resources, and to steward the public’s fundamental rights of fishing, navigation, commerce, drinking water, hunting, swimming, sustenance, recreation, and ecological values; and

WHEREAS, climate change represents the largest water diversion out of the Great Lakes, increases water temperature and water levels, and threatens the security, flows, levels, and health of our Great Lakes; and

WHEREAS recognizing the waters of the Great Lakes as a public trust is one of four steps needed to declare [name of municipality] a Blue Community;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that water is a shared public commons and public resource held in [public] trust by [name of municipality] for the health, safety, general welfare, and benefit of its residents and citizens; that protecting water as a shared public commons will build community resilience and adaption to climate change effects and ecological and human impacts; and that the [municipality] through its decisions and actions will assure its citizens that it will protect the integrity of the natural waters and public water supplies in quality and quantity from adverse pollution, impairment, waste, or from transfer or alienation for primarily private (as opposed to public) benefit, or from interference, or control.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the [municipality] will equally call on the state government, as trustee of the waters of the Great Lakes, to apply public trust principles to guide long-term natural resource stewardship and management, protect the paramount interests of the public over private ones, and uphold public trust law for the protection of these waters and the benefit of current and future generations.

SAMPLE RESOLUTION – RECOGNIZING WATER AND SANITATION AS HUMAN RIGHTS AND WATER AS A COMMONS

WHEREAS almost 2 billion people around the world do not have access to clean drinking water, 4 billion people face severe water scarcity, and 2.5 billion people do not have adequate sanitation; and

WHEREAS Indigenous communities in the U.S. have been disproportionately affected by lack of access to safe water and sanitation; and

WHEREAS on July 28, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution recognizing the human rights to water and sanitation; and

WHEREAS on September 23, 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council passed a resolution on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and called on governments to take concrete action by developing plans of action, establishing monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and ensuring affordable services for everyone; and

WHEREAS the human rights to water and sanitation are directly tied to the right to human health recognized by the United Nations and under the United States Constitution;

WHEREAS recognizing the rights to water and sanitation and water as a commons is one of four steps needed to declare [name of municipality] a Blue Community;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that [name of municipality] recognizes and affirms that water and sanitation are fundamental human rights and that water is a commons.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that [name of municipality] will call on the federal and state governments to enshrine the human rights to water and sanitation in federal and state law.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that [name of municipality] will call on the Government of the United States to develop a national plan of action to implement the human rights to water and sanitation.



SAMPLE RESOLUTION – BANNING OR PHASING OUT THE SALE OF BOTTLED WATER IN MUNICIPAL FACILITIES AND AT MUNICIPAL EVENTS

WHEREAS [name of municipality] operates and maintains a regulated and sophisticated water treatment and distribution system that meets some of the most stringent water quality requirements in the world; and

WHEREAS the regulatory requirements for monitoring water quality contained in bottled water are not as stringent as those that must be met by [name of municipality or community]; and

WHEREAS single-use bottled water is up to 3,000 times more expensive than water from the tap in [name of municipality], even though bottled water can originate from municipal water systems; and

WHEREAS resource extraction, packaging and distribution of bottled water creates unnecessary air quality and climate change impacts, consumes unnecessary resources such as oil in the manufacturing of plastic bottles and fuel used in the transportation of bottled water to the consumer, and creates unnecessary recycling and waste disposal costs; and

WHEREAS [name of municipality]’s tap water is safe, healthy and accessible to residents and visitors, is readily available at most indoor public facilities, and is substantially more sustainable than bottled water; and

WHEREAS when access to municipal tap water does not exist, bottled water can be an appropriate alternative;

WHEREAS banning [or phasing out] the sale and provision of bottled water in municipal facilities and at municipal events is one of four steps needed to declare [name of municipality] a Blue Community;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, where access to municipal tap water exists, single-use bottled water will no longer be sold in municipal facilities [or will be phased out by (year)], from municipally-owned or municipally administered concessions, or from vending machines in public facilities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT single-use bottled water will no longer be purchased and provided at municipal meetings and events where access to municipal water exists; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the availability of water jugs with municipal water will be increased at municipally-organized meetings and events; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a staff and public awareness campaign will be developed to support the rationale for these important changes; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT staff develop an implementation schedule with timelines, that includes an assessment of access to tap water at municipal facilities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT staff provide a progress report at regular intervals.

SAMPLE RESOLUTION – PROMOTING PUBLICLY FINANCED, OWNED AND OPERATED SAFE WATER AND WASTEWATER SERVICES

WHEREAS public health depends on equitable access to drinking water and sanitation systems; and

WHEREAS public ownership and operation of drinking water and wastewater treatment systems have been fundamental to access and quality over the past century; and

WHEREAS [name of municipality] is committed to protecting water and wastewater systems from the consequences of privatization through public-private partnerships, or P3s, that include:

- A lack of transparency and public accountability;
- Increased costs;
- Higher user fees;
- Multi-decade contracts that limit the policy options of future local governments; and
- International trade deals providing private water companies with rights to sue municipalities that bring water services into public hands; and

WHEREAS the privatization of municipal water and wastewater treatment systems and services through P3s or contracting out turns water into a commodity to be sold for profit; and

WHEREAS the American Civil Society of Engineers assigned a “D” rating to drinking water and wastewater infrastructure in the U.S. While the quality of drinking water remains high, pipes and mains are often more than 100-years-old and in need of replacement; and

WHEREAS water quality standards are becoming more stringent while federal support for water infrastructure is declining, creating a situation that could open the door to privatization unless dedicated public infrastructure funding is provided to upgrade treatment facilities;

WHEREAS keeping water and wastewater infrastructure public is one of four steps needed to declare [name of municipality] a Blue Community;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that [name of municipality] opposes privatization in any form of water and wastewater treatment infrastructure and services, including through P3s or short-term service contracts, and resolves to keep these services publicly financed, owned, operated and delivered; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that [name of municipality] works with the federal government to fulfill its responsibility to support municipal infrastructure by investing in a national water infrastructure fund that would address the growing need to renew existing water and wastewater infrastructure and build new systems, and that would only fund public projects; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that [name of municipality] will forward this resolution to the municipal or county organization that it belongs to including the US Conference of Mayors, the US League of Cities, State-level league of Municipalities, and the National Association of Counties.



Photo by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago via Flickr. CC by-nc 2.0

STEPS TO CREATING A BLUE COMMUNITY

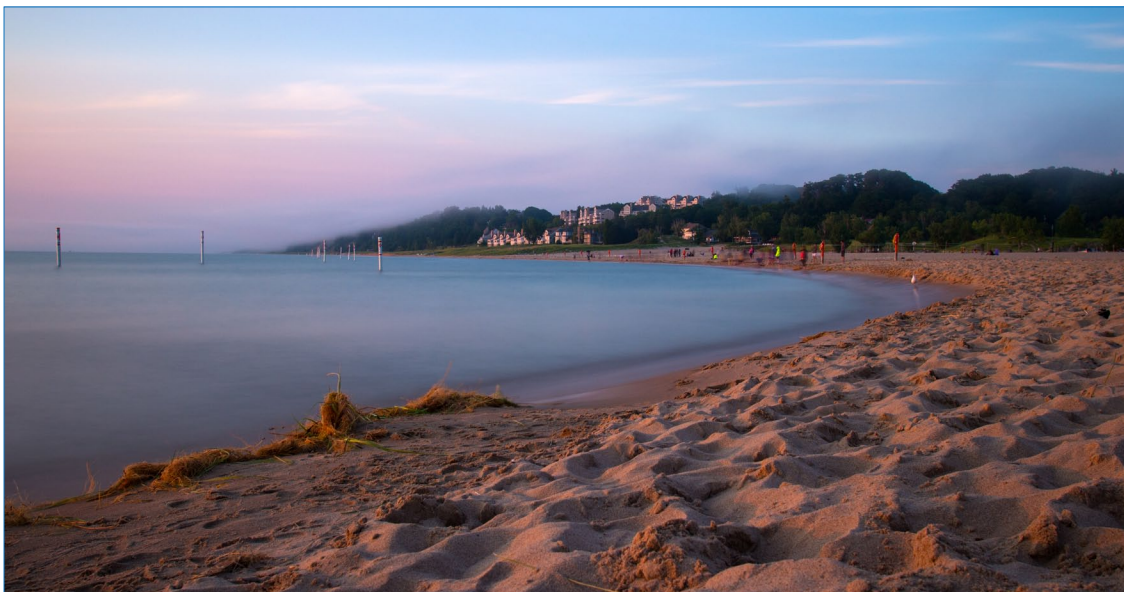
Recognizing that the waters of the Great Lakes are a public trust, commons and human right, communities can and should protect the waters of the Great Lakes Basin from being wasted, controlled, transferred or exported by private interests for private purposes or gain.

When municipalities promote public water services and commit to phasing out bottled water, they take important steps towards ensuring that the paramount interest of the community and the integrity of the human right to water of the Great Lakes Basin is not impaired, alienated or subordinated to private interests. By becoming a Blue Community, you will join the growing local, national and international movements to protect water as a commons, human right, and public trust – now and for future generations.

Be sure to check the full Blue Communities guide at canadians.org/bluecommunities for tips on how to make your community a Blue Community. Using the information provided in these guides will help you develop a strategy to promote water as a human right, keep water in public hands, and end the sale of bottled water at public facilities and events.

Send an email to bluecommunities@canadians.org to join the network of community activists, public sector workers, and local government officials working on creating a Blue Community.

Community members working on promoting the water commons are setting up Water Watch committees across the country. Visit canadians.org/bluecommunities or cupe.ca/water to find out more



"Fog on Lake Michigan" by Flickr user kirsten.elise. CC by-nc-sa 2.0

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OF CANADIANS



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