

Charter Declaration

We, the people of the Great Lakes, love and depend upon our waters to sustain our lives, our communities and all life in our ecosystem.

It is therefore with growing alarm that we confront a painful reality—that despite decades of effort the Lakes are more threatened than ever. As people from across the Great Lakes, we find this unacceptable. We cannot stand by while these waters are treated as an expendable and exploitable resource when we know they are a source of life.

Moved by a hope that we can yet create a thriving and life sustaining future for these Lakes, we step forward to take up our responsibility to care for and act on behalf of these waters, our Great Lakes Commons. Seeing that the health of our waters is intertwined with our own health and that of generations yet to come, we are called to assert a deeper connection and more powerful role in the future of our waters.

We hereby set forth the Great Lakes Commons Charter, a living document that affirms and empowers the wisdom and rightful role of the people of the Lakes as stewards of these waters.

This Declaration and the First Principles emerge from the collaborative work of people and communities around the lakes. Together we reflect many walks of life, histories and cultures. At the same time, a single purpose unites us: to transition to a mode of Great Lakes governance by which the waters and all living beings can flourish.

Towards this end, we affirm:

- That the waters of the Great Lakes have sustained the lives of the people and communities in their basin since time immemorial and they should continue to do so in perpetuity.
- That the waters, ecosystems, and communities of the Great Lakes are entwined and interdependent. Damage to any of these causes harm to the others.
- That the Great Lakes are a gift and a responsibility held in common by the peoples and communities of the Lakes and must be treated as such as to ensure their preservation for coming generations.
- That the boundaries of states, provinces and Nations crisscross the Lakes but do not divide their natural integrity. All decision-making that impacts the Great Lakes must place the well-being of the bio-region and ecosystem as a whole at the center of consideration.
- That the inherent sovereignty and rights of Indigenous peoples as codified in treaties and international agreements must be upheld as foundational to commons governance.



Therefore:

We join our voices in affirming the spirit and necessity of this declaration as the foundation for a renewed relationship and mode of governance for our Great Lakes Commons. We welcome the wisdom, standing and power that this document will accrue over time to shape the future of our Lakes. We invest it with our hopes and commitments to that future and to the future generations who will inherit the legacy of our actions.

In signing this Charter, we embrace our responsibility, individual and collective, to act on behalf of these waters and of future generations.



Out of our love for the Great Lakes and our responsibilities to future generations, we are calling for a renewed relationship with the Great Lakes. We are asking you to join us by adding your name and commitment to this transformative water governance agreement.

We are petitioning ourselves to unite across geography, ancestry, and issues about the future we want for these waters. Otherwise the Great Lakes will be destined to be:

- An object of management, rather than a partner in mutual restoration
- A measurable resource, rather than a revered source of life
- A commodity divided by political borders, rather than a shared and equitable commons

Water is the first medicine and can heal our exploitive relationships with mother earth and each other. The impacts of pollution and privatization are symptoms of this broken relationship. When you endorse the Great Lakes Commons Charter Declaration you join a growing community united around a truly restorative vision and practice.

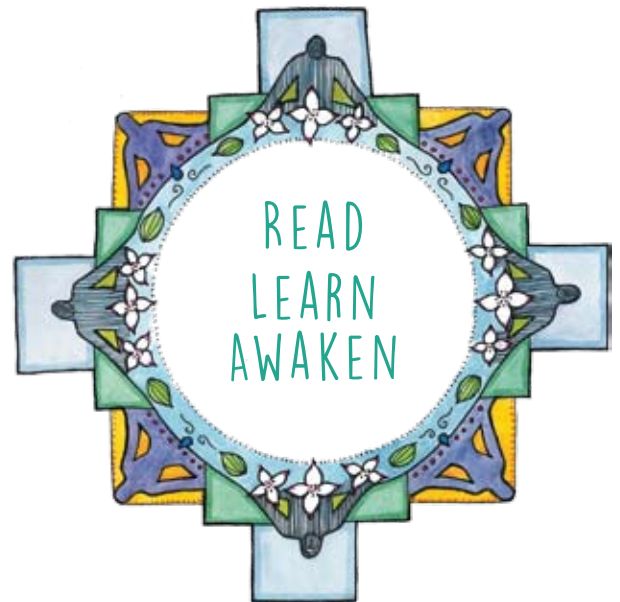
Drawing on the rich traditions within commons and Indigenous governance, this Declaration is coupled with a growing set of First Principles designed by Great Lakes communities as water protection guides. Together, these commitments braid unity and diversity throughout the watershed. They also affirm a simple truth: when we protect water as a shared and sacred commons -- we restore ourselves and our kinship across place and time.

THE GREAT LAKES COMMONS CHARTER IS:

INVITATIONAL We want to spark broad and inclusive discussion about Great Lakes governance.

ASPIRATIONAL We want to collaboratively define and equitably organize the foundations for protecting the Great Lakes for at least the next 7 generations.

TRUTHFUL We want to elevate Indigenous self-determination, human rights to water, informed and participatory decision making, and the restorative power of water protection.



ADD YOUR NAME AND COMMITMENT
TO THE CHARTER

