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 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 these 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.
An Invitation

We need to define the future we want for these Lakes and stand up for it. The Great Lakes Commons Charter is central to that effort — and so are you.

Out of our love for the Great Lakes and our responsibilities to future generations, we are calling for a renewed relationship and mode of governance for the Great Lakes Commons. We are asking you to join us.

Drawing on the rich knowledge of commons and Indigenous traditions, the Great Lakes Commons Charter is a participatory effort to build community engagement, agreement and shared responsibility for the water.

Together we are creating a living Charter that embodies commons governing philosophy: that these lakes are irreplaceable, sacred, and necessary for life and must be carefully shared and protected in perpetuity.

Why a Great Lakes Commons Charter?

In helping create the Charter you are:

- **sharing** and developing guiding principles for the care of our waters
- **activating** people in the region to take leadership in water stewardship in accordance with these principles
- **laying groundwork** for a commons approach to the care and governance of our waters (e.g. bio-regional, eco-system-based, multi-generational in perspective and empowering of local communities)

We want this Charter to grow in wisdom and agreement with more people adding to and shaping its contents. We see it as a necessary, timely and transformative intervention in the care of these Lakes.

The Commons Charter is...

**Invitational:** We want to spark broad and inclusive public discussion and involvement in the future of the Lakes

**Aspirational:** We want to define together the foundation for life-sustaining Great Lakes Commons governance

**Equitable:** We want the perspectives and leadership of people often left out of Great Lakes decision, particularly First Nations/Native Americans as well as grassroots communities around the Lakes.

Great Lakes Commons

How Can I Participate?

No one person or group can create a new charter for the Great Lakes. It is something we have to do together.

The Great Lakes Commons initiative has collaboratively drafted a Declaration and gathered some first principles to begin the conversation.

READ, LEARN, SIGN AND SHARE! ACT!

greatlakescommons.org