



The Great Lakes Commons Initiative is a grassroots effort to establish the Great Lakes as a living commons — shared waters that we all take care of and protect in perpetuity.

The Great Lakes Commons Initiative works to:

Awaken and restore
our relationship
to these incredible waters.

Activate
a spirit of responsibility for the water.

Foster
governance that enables communities
to protect these waters forever.

We are a growing network of people, organizations and institutions who care passionately about these remarkable bodies of water. Leadership of the Great Lakes Commons reflects an unusual and promising alliance of people from across Nations, geography, ancestry and traditions in the bioregion. 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.

We are united in our commitment to the long term transformation health of the Great Lakes and that of future generations.



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, SHARE AND ACT!

greatlakescommons.org



Why a Great Lakes Commons?

The Great Lakes Commons Initiative recognizes that fundamental change is essential to create a sustaining future for our Great Lakes. Decades of activism and effort (and even some remarkable victories) have not resulted in thriving and protected waters. It is clear that a transformation of our relationship to these waters and of the region's water governance is key for enabling us to care for this life-giving ecosystem.

The Great Lake Commons initiative draws on the knowledge and practice of both commons and Indigenous governance. Both models base governance on shared benefit and responsibility, sustainable use, and participatory decision-making. And they are bolstered by the powerful legal traditions held in the public trust doctrine and regional treaty rights.

Of course the Great Lakes are already a commons—something shared by many and belonging to none. But they are a neglected commons, left vulnerable to misuse all too often. A true commons lives in the understandings, relationships, actions, and laws recognized by the public. A commons needs commoners who are empowered to act as stewards and protectors.

The Great Lakes Commons Charter: A living future for our bio-region

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.

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.

The Great Lakes 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 decisions, particularly First Nations/Native Americans as well as grassroots communities around the Lakes.



Cover photo courtesy Melanie Ariens. See more at ariansmelanie.wix.com