

OneFAB

Information Delivered on One Page, Front And Back

Great Lakes Commission

Jeff Mann, General Counsel and Chief Editor

What is the Great Lakes Commission?

The Great Lakes Commission is an interstate agency that represent states and provinces that border the Great Lakes Basin. Created in 1955 through the Great Lakes Basin Compact, the agency is tasked with, among other things, promoting "the orderly, integrated, and comprehensive development, use, and conservation of the water resources of the Great Lakes Basin".¹ The eight member states are Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec are associate (i.e., nonvoting) members.

As described within the Compact, the Great Lakes Basin includes:

1. Lakes Erie, Huron, Michigan, Ontario, St. Clair, Superior, and the St. Lawrence River, together with any and all natural or manmade water interconnections between or among them.
2. All rivers, ponds, lakes, streams, and other watercourses which, in their natural state or in their prevailing conditions, are tributary to Lakes Erie, Huron, Michigan, Ontario, St. Clair, and Superior or any of them or which comprise part of any watershed draining into any of said lakes.²

Figure 1 on the next page shows the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin.

Governing Documents

As noted above, the Great Lakes Basin Compact established the Commission in 1955. In addition to creating the Commission and prescribing its composition, powers, and the mechanisms for its operation, the Compact specifies the purposes of the Compact and the mechanism for it to take legal effect. It includes provisions obliging each of the member states to consider the actions of the Commission with respect to, among other things, the stabilization of lake levels, uniformity of navigation, fishing, and fisheries/wildlife regulation, and the diversion of waters from and into the Great Lakes Basin. The Compact required each state to ratify it to take effect. Michigan did so under Public Act 28 of 1955, effective April 14, 1955, which was recodified under Part 322 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act. Under Article I, Section 10 of the United States Constitution, interstate compacts also require Congressional approval to take effect. Congress gave limited consent to the Compact in 1968.³

The Commission subsequently adopted bylaws, which govern the Commission's membership, board of directors and officers, committees, meetings, and finances. The bylaws recognize a Declaration of Partnership, which grants the provinces of Ontario and Quebec associate membership within the Commission. This allows them to participate in the Commission's activities, deliberations, and meetings.

¹ Great Lakes Basin Compact, Art I.

² Great Lakes Basin Compact, Art. III.

³ Under Public Law 90-419 (July 24, 1968), Congress noted that its consent did not apply to certain aspects of the Compact that purported to allow Canada to enter into the Compact or to allow the Commission to recommend or negotiate international agreements or treaties pertaining to the Great Lakes.

Lastly, the Commission routinely implements a strategic plan. The Great Lakes Commission Strategic Plan is a "statement of vision, mission, goals, objectives and strategic actions" which instruct the Commission's work for the succeeding five years.⁴ The most recent iteration of the Commission's strategic plan was adopted in March 2023.

Figure 1



Source: International Joint Commission website (derived from ESRI, USGS, and NOAA information)

Composition, Staffing, and Budget

The Commission is comprised of at least three, but not more than five, individuals from each of its member states. Under Michigan law, five members are specified for the Michigan delegation: the Governor and Attorney General (or their respective designees), appointees of the Senate Majority Leader and Speaker of the House, and an individual appointed by the Governor.⁵ Each state's delegation to the Commission gets three votes when deciding on matters before the Commission, and each state's law controls how the votes are divided. In the case of Michigan's delegation, each Michigan commissioner gets a three-fifths vote on the matter in question.

One commissioner from each member state's delegation is selected by that state's governor to serve on the Commission Board of the Directors. From these members, the commissioners elect a chair and a vice chair. The Commission also employs a president and other executive staff as needed. The Commission employs just under two dozen staff at its office in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

⁴ "Governing Documents", Great Lakes Commission, <https://www.glc.org/about/documents>. Retrieved 8-2-2023.

⁵ MCL 324.32202.