



**COUNCIL OF THE
GREAT LAKES REGION**
Solving for Sustainability™

United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) Communication on Engagement (COE)

April 2022 - March 2024



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Statement of Continued Support by the CEO

On behalf of the Council of the Great Lakes Region (CGLR), a binational group of related non-profit organizations, CGLR USA, the CGLR Foundation, CGLR Canada, and the CGLR Canada Foundation, we are proud to be a participant of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC). We strongly support the advancement of its ten principles with respect to human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption, and we continue to commit our full support to driving action. Through this Communication on Engagement, we further aim to uphold transparency and accountability with our stakeholders as we demonstrate the steps we are taking and our progress towards solving for the sustainability in the Great Lakes region and building the first sustainable region in North America and the world.

As stated in our Letter of Commitment to UNGC submitted in March 2022 on behalf of the CGLR Foundation, and again in February 2024 on behalf of the CGLR Canada, we are committed to implementing partnerships on corporate sustainability and engaging with other stakeholders; supporting the UN Global Compact business participants as they implement and report on their sustainability efforts; engaging with Global Compact Local Networks in Canada and USA; and joining and/or supporting issue platforms and work streams where relevant to CGLR programs.

Sincerely,

Mark P. Fisher
President and CEO

About Council of the Great Lakes Region (CGLR)

The CGLR network of organizations include the CGLR Foundation (an Ohio-based 501c3 public charity), CGLR USA (Ohio-based 501c6 trade association), CGLR Canada (Ontario-based not-for-profit corporation), and CGLR Canada Foundation. Funding comes primarily from three sources—sponsorships, program memberships, and grants.

Directed and controlled by independent boards of directors with guidance from a larger group of Honorary Patrons, the CGLR group of organizations are working to turn the binational Great Lakes region into the first sustainable region in the world.

We are advancing this vision by accelerating the transition to a sustainable future by uniquely bringing diverse perspectives and interests together to explore and solve our most pressing socio-economic and environmental challenges in the North American Great Lakes region.

Our Why

Since its founding in 2013, CGLR has been a catalyst in deepening the United States – Canada relationship in the Great Lakes region, and creating stronger and more dynamic collaborations to harness the Great Lakes region’s economic strengths and assets, improving the well-being and prosperity of the region’s people, and protecting the environment and the Great Lakes for future generations.

In 2023, CGLR’s new 3-year strategic plan went into effect to deliver on CGLR’s new vision and mission. Through this work, the organization is striving to be the leader in driving the transformational changes necessary for the Great Lakes region to accelerate the region’s transition to a sustainable future. We are solving for sustainability, and we will accomplish our vision and mission by:

1. Adopting and facilitating a systemic approach for regional issue identification, research and analysis, problem solving, and acting in a collaborative and unified manner,
2. Focusing on issues that are material to the Great Lakes region’s sustainable development,
3. Advancing conversations and solutions that will benefit the people, economy and environment in the entire Great Lakes region, not just the Great Lakes basin,
4. Convening all interests, across borders and sectors, in the Great Lakes region to share knowledge, stimulate debate, and create a context for understanding and collaboration to emerge, and
5. Integrating individual well-being, environmental and economic considerations into everything we do to ensure the Great Lakes region’s success and development is lasting.

Vital to building and sustaining the organization’s reputation, success, and long-term growth and impact is adopting clear values and insisting they are upheld - at the board table, amongst employees, and when engaging stakeholders as well as current and prospective funders.

Our Values

- Inclusive & Collaborative
- Thoughtful & Forward Looking
- Impactful & Accountable
- Pragmatic & Transformative

For more information, please visit the CGLR website: <http://councilgreatlakesregion.org/>

Description of Programs, Actions and Outcomes: April 2022- March 2024

The Great Lakes make up the largest freshwater system in the world, containing roughly 20% of the world's and 84% of North America's surface freshwater. The lakes sustain life for thousands of species and provide drinking water for over 40 million people. The broader mega-region, which spans across eight US states [Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York] and two Canadian provinces [Ontario, Quebec], is home to 107 million people, provides 51 million jobs, and accounts for roughly 50% of all US-Canada bilateral border trade. As a result, this mega-region serves as North America's economic engine.

No single organization can strengthen the region's long-term economic success and environmental protection alone, which is why the CGLR network of organizations prioritizes cross-sector and cross-industry partnerships and collaboration through its programs and research.

CGLR serves as a unified voice for the region's varied economic, social, and environmental interests. Achieving transformative, long-term change is ambitious, and obtaining the necessary investments may not always come easy, but our collective will for impactful change and the pragmatic measures we implement will set CGLR, and the region, up for success. The initiatives currently underway and facilitated by CGLR are below with the successes and key outcomes listed for the April 2022 – March 2024 period.

1. Business and Sustainability Program

It is only with the involvement of all stakeholders, including the participation of the business community, that a truly sustainable regional economy and environment can be achieved. Therefore, with initial funding from the Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation, CGLR set out to engage companies headquartered and/or operating in the Great Lakes region to build business support for a healthy Great Lakes ecosystem and regional economy through a platform that fosters trusting relationships and collaborative solutions and actions.

In addition to building essential business networks, foundational sustainability-focused programs have been developed to engage companies more deeply with on-the-ground action that supports their material sustainability interests, while at the same time addressing the needs of the region.

Through feedback and dialogue, CGLR identified four priority thematic areas that serve as the pillars for existing and new programming under the Business and Sustainability umbrella. They include:

1. Circular Economy
2. Water Stewardship
3. Decarbonization
4. Sustainable Food Systems

Outreach efforts to engage Great Lakes businesses continue, and as business sustainability priorities become more defined, programming will expand to support the region's corporate sustainability ambitions. The following highlights the initiatives under the Business and Sustainability Program.

1.1 Circular Great Lakes

Forging a Future Without Waste.

Creating a binational Great Lakes circular economy and cleaning up marine litter is one way to close the loop and keep critical materials cycling through the regional economy. According to a recent report, it is estimated that 81% of the Great Lakes post-consumer waste is lost to landfills, including valuable materials like plastic. Redirecting these materials from being landfill-bound to being reused or recycled/upcycled is of utmost importance and a mission of one of CGLR's initiatives – the Circular Great Lakes.

The Circular Great Lakes (CGL) initiative launched in March 2021 is a catalyst for identifying transformational projects, forming partnerships, and mobilizing public-private sector investments required to ensure valuable materials never become waste or pollution in this mega-region, starting with plastics.

Following an assessment of areas of best management practices, a cohesive 5-year strategy and action plan was published in June 2022 which outlined a path to achieving a regional circular economy for plastics. Since then, projects have been established and ongoing growth has been witnessed with the initiative.

Key Outcomes:

- The Great Lakes Circular Economy Strategy and Action Plan for Plastics was published in June 2022. Download [here](#).
- 9 corporate activation partners: Charter Next Generation, Imperial, Meijer, American Packaging, Dart, Reyes Coca-Cola, Brightmark, LyondellBasell, and Rothmans, Benson & Hedges
- Over 40 cross-sector knowledge partners - a growing network representing government, academia, and the nonprofit sector to capture diverse perspectives and interests.
- 4 circular economy focus areas with projects initiated:
 1. Capture & Cleanup
 2. Collection, Processing & End Markets
 3. Legislative Outreach & Education
 4. Consumer Education

More about the Circular Great Lakes can be read here: <https://www.circulargreatlakes.org/>

1.1.a Circular Great Lakes - Capture & Cleanup Focus Area Projects

Great Lakes Plastic Cleanup

Action to Clean Up the Waterways of the Great Lakes Region.

It is known that valuable materials are lost to landfills and the environment, especially plastics. In fact, an estimated 22 million pounds (10,000 tons) of plastic pollution could be entering the Great Lakes every year from the U.S. and Canada according to models developed by the Rochester Institute of Technology.

Aligned with the Capture and Cleanup priority focus area of the Circular Great Lakes initiative, the Great Lakes Plastic Cleanup (GLPC) is led jointly by CGLR and Pollution Probe and brings together communities and local partners across Canada and the United States to take action on the plastic pollution problem in the Great Lakes. The GLPC uses innovative technology to remove plastics at marinas, waterways, and beaches across the Great Lakes. The litter collected is analyzed to better understand the sources and pathways, and when possible, the valuable plastics recovered are redirected back into the recycling system.

After launching in Canada in 2020, the GLPC expanded into the American side of the Great Lakes in 2022 thanks to funding support from NOAA and Meijer. Partnerships were established with marinas and local partner organizations in New York, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin, allowing capture and cleanup efforts to start operating new GLPC technologies in summer 2022.

Great Lakes Plastic Cleanup Key Outcomes:

- 65 Canada partners; 9 USA partners
- 138 capture and cleanup sites across the US and Canada, with 143 technologies deployed. Technologies include:
 - BeBots
 - Gutter Bins
 - Pixie Drones
 - LittaTraps
 - Seabins
- An estimated 191,810 pieces were collected between 2020 when the program launched to the 2023 cleanup season.
- US partners collected and characterized 47,783 pieces of debris during the 2023 season.
- Canadian partners diverted an estimated 26,544 pieces of debris during the 2023 season.

More information about the Great Lakes Plastic Cleanup can be read here:

<https://www.greatlakesplasticcleanup.org/>

Stormwater Filtration System Grant Project

Catching Litter Before It Hits Waterways.

Plastic litter can end up in the environment through different pathways, and stormwater drains could be a big source, especially in places with large populations.

Thanks to funding from the Dart Container Corporation to the Council of the Great Lakes Region, CGLR offers a grant to help communities purchase, install, and monitor innovative stormwater filtration systems. When in place, these devices, such as the LittaTrap™ and the Gutter Bin,® help prevent land-based plastic litter, oil, and sediment from entering our waterways and ultimately the Great Lakes.

Stormwater Filtration System Grant Project Key Outcomes:

- Since initiation in 2023, the grant has approved the dispersal of over USD \$40,000.
- Funding has supported the purchase and installation of 32 catch basin devices.
- Devices to be deployed across the Great Lakes region in Ontario, Illinois and Michigan.

More information about the Stormwater Filtration System Grant Project can be read here: <https://www.circulargreatlakes.org/captureandcleanup>

1.1.b Circular Great Lakes - Collection, Processing & End Markets Focus Area Projects

Boat Wrap Film Recycling Pilot Project

Unwrapping a Future Without Plastic Waste.

Due to the Great Lakes region's climate, winterizing and shrink-wrapping boats is a common measure taken in most parts of the region to protect boats from snow and ice damage. This step requires millions of pounds of valuable plastic film to be used as boat wrap, material that is almost universally landfilled every spring.

To address the loss of this valuable material, CGLR and its partners initiated a boat wrap film recycling pilot project in Spring 2023 in Chicago and Lake County, IL. The pilot brings the plastic value chain together with state government agencies, local marina partners and other stakeholders to close the loop and create a Great Lakes circular economy for boat shrink wrap film.

With the initial success from the pilot and now equipped with lessons learned, CGLR is aiming to replicate and scale the initiative across the Great Lakes region on both sides of the Canada-US border.

Key Outcomes from the 2023 Boat Wrap Recycling Pilot Project:

- 27,000 pounds of boat shrink wrap collected from 1068 boats at 8 marinas.

More information about the Boat Wrap Film Recycling Project can be read here: <https://www.circulargreatlakes.org/collectionprocessingandendmarkets>

Secondary Plastics Processing Pilot Project

Increasing Plastics Processing Capacity.

Despite the fact that there are over 200 material recovery facilities (MRFs) in the region that process core recyclables, most are unable to sort today's lightweight plastic packaging formats due to aging equipment and insufficient economies of scale to supply this as post consumer recycled (PCR) feedstock for end markets.

To increase plastics processing capacity and diversion in the Great Lakes region as well as meet high and growing demand for recycled feedstock, a hub-and-spoke approach for plastics feedback collection, sortation and processing is required. Therefore, CGLR with its Circular Great Lakes partners, initiated a pilot project to deploy Titus' Portable Secondary MRF for a six to eight week period starting at the end of May 2024 in the Great Lakes region, specifically at a new state of the art recycling facility in Chicago operated by LRS.

The overall aim of this pilot project is to dig deeper into the Chicago and Great Lakes recycling stream to recover low-volume and difficult to manually sort materials, such as PE films, and how we can reach the critical mass necessary to achieve the economies of scale for sorting all materials by type within a regional watershed. The findings will help determine the investments, volumes, and policy changes required to design, build, and operate a full-scale secondary processing / plastics feedstock network and optimize the region's recycling system.

Key Outcomes from the Secondary Plastics Processing Pilot Project:

- Kicked off Phase 1 of the project in January 2024.
- Developed an implementation plan and schedule for the Portable Secondary MRF to start running in May 2024.

1.1.c Circular Great Lakes - Legislative Outreach and Education Focus Area Projects

Legislative Outreach and Education Project

Supporting Policy Makers on Materials Management and Circular Economy Issues.

If we are going to achieve the US and Canada's national strategies on recycling and meet a 50% recycling rate by 2030, legislatures in the Great Lakes region will need to adopt laws, policies, and regulations, as well as make investments with the private sector, to sustainably manage household and IC&I plastics and other materials in a manner that is consistent across the region.

High turnover in legislative bodies decreases the institutional knowledge concerning complex materials management issues in states and provincial legislatures. Furthermore, legislators responsible for developing materials management policies often lack a comprehensive

understanding of how these systems operate with an increasing focus on sustainability and circular economy principles.

Therefore, CGLR is developing a legislative outreach program, supported by a comprehensive curriculum, toolkits and tours, to help regional legislators learn about how to make informed policy and investment choices by increasing their knowledge of the complex issues associated with materials management and the circular economy.

Key Outcomes from the Legislative Outreach and Education Project:

- Kicked off Phase 1 of the project in January 2024.
- Developed an implementation plan and conducted an internal assessment.
- Initiated the development of education materials and a state/provincial assessment.

1.1.d Circular Great Lakes - Consumer Education Focus Area

Retail Take Back Pilot Project

Increasing Plastic Film Recycling While Educating Consumers.

Core plastic packaging is commonly collected in programs across the region and at the community level. However, emerging and complex plastics are not because of a lack of local collection and access to drop-offs in urban and rural communities, including plastic films and flexible plastic packaging.

While front-of-store take-back infrastructure for polyethylene (PE) bags, wraps and other film packaging exist in the region, there is a need and opportunity to significantly boost collection of this material to serve emerging end markets and support packaging circularity goals for brands and retailers. Therefore, CGLR is working with its partners, including midwest retailer Meijer, to develop best practices and toolkits for starting and enhancing retail drop off programs for flexible plastic packaging and films.

This project will help increase the diversion, recycling, and reuse of this valuable, post-consumer material and help identify new end markets such as advanced recycling facilities and recycling technologies. As an added benefit, with access to millions of consumers of all ages, collaborating with grocery stores and retailers to deliver this project provides an excellent opportunity to connect with and educate shoppers on the issue of plastic waste and litter in the Great Lakes region and offer solutions to address this problem.

Key Outcomes from the Retail Take Back Pilot Project:

- Aligned partners and kicked off Phase 1 of the project in January 2024.

1.2 Great Lakes WISE

Ensuring the responsible use and forward-looking management of water.

Focused on water stewardship and conservation, the Great Lakes Water Innovation and Stewardship Exchange (WISE) is a peer-to-peer network of cross-sector stakeholders committed to accelerating corporate water stewardship, developing effective water sustainability solutions within enterprise operations, and collectively addressing water challenges and opportunities. Announced in June 2022, WISE provides a range of technical, educational, and marketing benefits that delivers added value its member organizations.

Key Outcomes:

- 5 founding corporate partners: A.O. Smith, BlueTriton Brands, Sloan, Veolia North America, Watts Water Technologies.
- The Great Lakes WISE Charter was approved and finalized.
- Quarterly meetings convene partners and explore topics and projects for cooperation.

1.3 Great Lakes Carbon Collaborative

Decarbonizing Our Future.

The bi-national Great Lakes region has a rich and vibrant mix of businesses from the automotive, chemical, refining, and steel sectors - many of which have aggressive carbon reduction goals already in place.

To support regional carbon reduction goals, CGLR and the US Business Council for Sustainable Development has been co-leading the Great Lakes Carbon Collaborative since October 2021, spurring dialogue across sectors, customers, and suppliers up and down the value stream, in order to inspire and facilitate the development of multi-industry decarbonization projects in the Great Lakes region.

The structure of the Great Lakes Carbon Collaborative enables broad collaboration without losing business focus. It is specifically tailored to businesses and organizations with operations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Ontario and Quebec - but may extend further outside of the region as appropriate.

The region's mix of industry, existing infrastructure, and unique natural attributes of water and other ecosystem services has already focused attention and identified some barriers and opportunities for action. Better understanding of carbon reduction techniques helps participating company representatives engage internal decision-makers on potential solutions, leading to de-risked investments in appropriate decarbonization strategies.

Key Outcomes:

- 3 Working groups are meeting regularly: Hydrogen; Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS); and Nature-based Solutions.
- A quarterly Carbon Collaborative webinar schedule has been introduced to highlight topics important for reducing the region's carbon footprint and to engage a wider audience.
- The Great Lakes Carbon Collaborative has combined meetings with the Gulf Coast Carbon Collaborative to broaden discussion and knowledge-sharing.

More information about the Great Lakes Carbon Collaborative can be read here:

<https://greatlakes.carbon-collaborative.org/>

2. Great Lakes Higher Education Consortium

The Great Lakes Higher Education Consortium is considering a new era of cross-border, institutional collaboration in the bi-national Great Lakes region with an emphasis on three overarching priorities: skills and talent development, research and innovation, and entrepreneurship. Focused on building tomorrow's workforce, the Consortium provides a forum for creating and funding more regular, impactful, cross-border collaborations amongst Great Lakes higher education institutions, first and foremost, and then between these institutions, companies, and government to find solutions to the most pressing socio-economic and environmental pressures facing the region.

Key Outcomes:

- 6 Partner institutions: University of Toronto, University of Illinois System, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin System, Queen's University, McGill University
- The 2023-2026 Strategic Plan for the Great Lakes Higher Education Consortium & Partnership Fund was published in June 2023.
- Monthly partner meetings are held to discuss collaboration opportunities.

More information about the Great Lakes Higher Education Consortium can be read here:

<https://councilgreatlakesregion.org/great-lakes-higher-education-consortium/>

3. Great Lakes Border Trade and Supply Chain Alliance

In collaboration with The Federal Bridge Corporation Limited (FBCL) and members of the Bridge and Tunnel Operators Association (BTOA), CGLR Canada and CGLR USA announced the Great Lakes Border Trade and Supply Chain Alliance in November 2022.

The Alliance will convene key border, transportation, business, and supply chain stakeholders and decision-makers from both sides of the border to discuss pressing issues facing regional and international Ports of Entry in the Great Lakes and the supply chains that underpin the

region's economic security and jobs. Aligned with CGLR's focus on building a regional economy that can compete and win in a rapidly changing North American and global economy, the Alliance will also serve as a forum to promote and pilot solutions that will achieve a smart, secure, and efficient border in the bi-national Great Lakes region, as well as more resilient, connected, and adaptive supply chains.

4. Knowledge-Sharing Platform

The Council of the Great Lakes Region uses its platform as a space, both physical and virtual, for information, dialogue, and collaboration, with a shared vision for economic growth, conservation, and individual wellbeing in one of the world's most important regions, which holds 20% of Earth's surface freshwater. Below are some of the ways we facilitate knowledge sharing with our members, partners, and the wider stakeholder community to connect global and regional thought leadership with local action.

4.1 Great Lakes Sustainable Growth Forum

The Great Lakes Sustainable Growth Forum is CGLR's annual flagship event (formerly the Great Lakes Economic Forum). Launched in 2015, it is an in-person multi-day event that brings together leaders from all levels of government, business, academia, and the non-profit sector to decipher key trends and find new ways that this binational region can collaborate and capitalize on the region's strategic advantages.

CGLR paused the event in 2023 as we undertook a strategic review, which led to the event's rebranding to the Great Lakes Sustainable Growth Forum. The forum will be held under its new name for the first time in June 2024.

Key Highlights from the June 2022 Forum:

- Two days focused on the region's economy and its environment and sustainability.
- More than 15 plenary and breakout sessions that varied in topic from economic development, border management, and trade and supply chains to water stewardship, circularity of materials, and climate change, and much more.
- 200+ delegates representing regional and local leadership from all sectors, including:
 - EPA Region 5 Regional Administrator Debra Shore
 - Former US Ambassador to Canada Bruce Heyman
 - Illinois Governor JB Pritzker
 - Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot

In early 2024, planning began for the first forum under the new rebranded name, and the Great Lakes Sustainable Growth Forum 2024 is set to take place June 25-27 in Toronto, Ontario. Visit the event webpage for more information:

<https://councilgreatlakesregion.org/great-lakes-sustainable-growth-forum/>

4.2 Great Lakes Insights

The Great Lakes Insights housed on the CGLR website (formerly referred to as the Online Great Lakes Economic Forum) serves as a 'go to' source for relevant information on a range of socioeconomic and environmental issues considered of material importance to the region's private sector, primarily, but also the public and nonprofit sectors. Amplifying regional voices and sharing best practice, the online forum houses articles, press releases, and a monthly webinar series of webinars.

Key Outcomes:

- 20 webinars with a total of over 3000 registrants (including a webinar with UNGC Network USA in January 2024, which can be viewed [here](#))
- 2 in person networking events held (Detroit, MI and Ottawa, ON)
- 34 published posts/articles highlighting research and thought leadership

Visit the Great Lakes Insights here: <https://councilgreatlakesregion.org/great-lakes-insights/>

Visit CGLR YouTube for past webinars: <https://www.youtube.com/@councilofthegreatlakesregion>

CGLR's Commitment

The CGLR group of organizations are committed to Solving for Sustainability in the Great Lakes region. We will continue to work with passion to safeguard the region's environment and support its long-term economic strength and competitiveness.