DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS PLASTIC POLLUTION IN THE GREAT LAKES BASIN

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Great Lakes Microplastic Summit

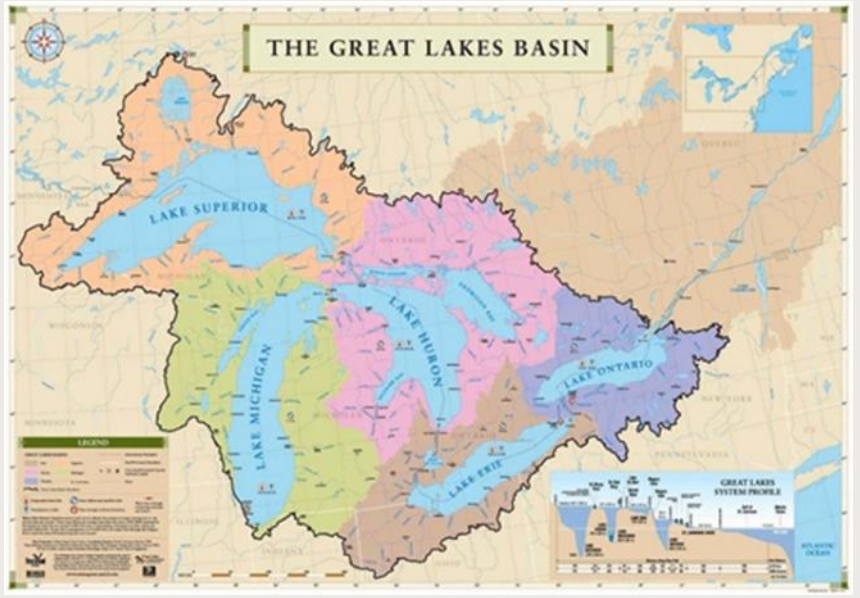
October 7, 2026

Great Lakes Commission
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Great Lakes
RESTORATION

WHAT IS THE GREAT LAKES COMMISSION?

- A public agency established by the Great Lakes Basin Compact in 1955
- In 1968, Congress passed an act authorizing its consent to the Compact and the interstate compact agency.
- Ontario and Québec officially joined as associate members in 1999
- Allows its Member states and provinces speak with a unified voice and to reach consensus on and advocate for the region's priorities



WHO IS THE GREAT LAKES COMMISSION?

- **Commissioners:**
  3-5 from each of the 10 states and provinces

- **Board of Directors:**
  1 from each state / province delegation

- **Chair: Tim Bruno**, Pennsylvania

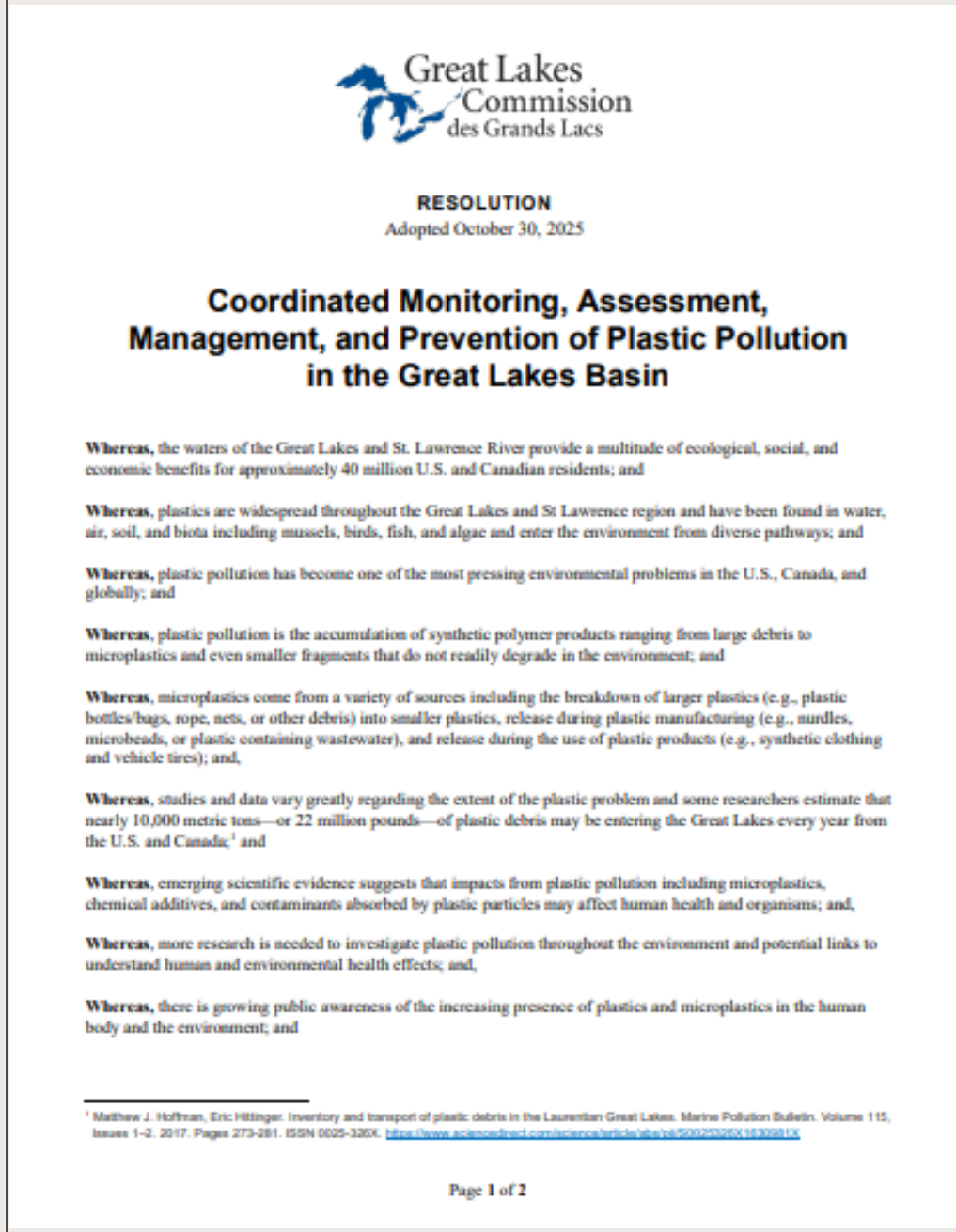
- **Professional Staff**

- **Resolutions on Great Lakes issues**



ORIGINS OF WORK

- Commissioners passed policy resolution in October 2025 to establish ad hoc committee on plastic pollution
- Charged to evaluate opportunities on monitoring, source reduction, waste management, public education and funding support
- Develop an action plan to address plastic pollution
- Bolster partnerships and collaboration to implement action plan



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RESOLUTION
Adopted October 30, 2025

Coordinated Monitoring, Assessment, Management, and Prevention of Plastic Pollution in the Great Lakes Basin

Whereas, the waters of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River provide a multitude of ecological, social, and economic benefits for approximately 40 million U.S. and Canadian residents; and

Whereas, plastics are widespread throughout the Great Lakes and St Lawrence region and have been found in water, air, soil, and biota including mussels, birds, fish, and algae and enter the environment from diverse pathways; and

Whereas, plastic pollution has become one of the most pressing environmental problems in the U.S., Canada, and globally; and

Whereas, plastic pollution is the accumulation of synthetic polymer products ranging from large debris to microplastics and even smaller fragments that do not readily degrade in the environment; and

Whereas, microplastics come from a variety of sources including the breakdown of larger plastics (e.g., plastic bottles/bags, rope, nets, or other debris) into smaller plastics, release during plastic manufacturing (e.g., nurdles, microbeads, or plastic containing wastewater), and release during the use of plastic products (e.g., synthetic clothing and vehicle tires); and,

Whereas, studies and data vary greatly regarding the extent of the plastic problem and some researchers estimate that nearly 10,000 metric tons—or 22 million pounds—of plastic debris may be entering the Great Lakes every year from the U.S. and Canada;[1] and

Whereas, emerging scientific evidence suggests that impacts from plastic pollution including microplastics, chemical additives, and contaminants absorbed by plastic particles may affect human health and organisms; and,

Whereas, more research is needed to investigate plastic pollution throughout the environment and potential links to understand human and environmental health effects; and,

Whereas, there is growing public awareness of the increasing presence of plastics and microplastics in the human body and the environment; and

[1] Matthew J. Hoffman, Eric Hittinger. Inventory and transport of plastic debris in the Laurentian Great Lakes. Marine Pollution Bulletin. Volume 115, Issues 1–2. 2017. Pages 273-281. ISSN 0025-326X. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0025326X1630981X

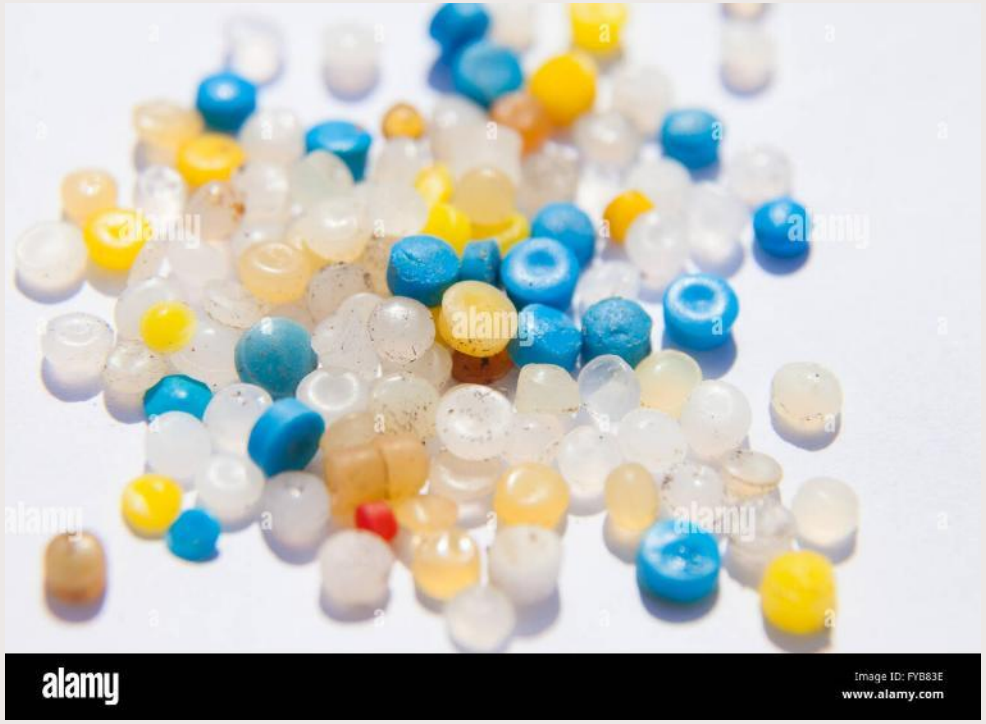
AD HOC COMMITTEE ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

- Representatives from all 10 Great Lakes jurisdictions
- State and provincial agency staff appointed by Commissioners
- Monthly meetings started in February 2026
- Review existing plastics policy and program landscape in the region to address resolution charge



DOING THE WORK

- Funding through Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
- Intensive work session July 2026
  - Advice from plastics monitoring researchers and professionals and experts in source reduction and waste management
- Creation of subcommittees to address action plan components



SUBCOMMITTEES

- Three subcommittees:
  - Monitoring and Research
  - Source Reduction & Waste Management
  - Education

- Additional expertise from appointees from the ad hoc committee

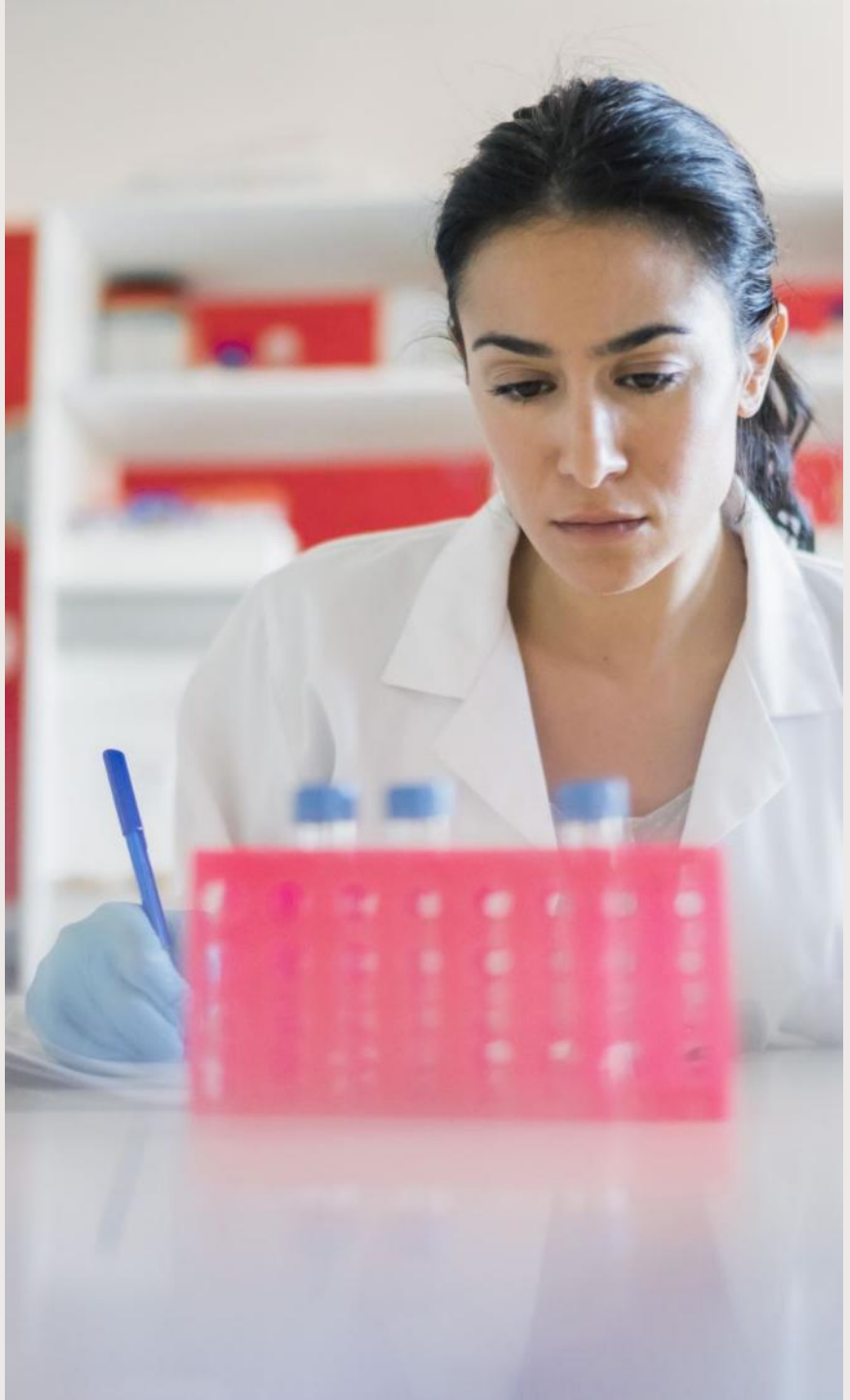
- Inviting additional advisors for work started in September 2026



MONITORING

Simplified subcommittee charge:

1. Identify goals for a basin-wide monitoring effort to evaluate status and trends.
2. Support the collaborative establishment of baseline conditions by advancing a harmonized monitoring approach
3. Recommend options for a basin-wide communication and data reporting system
4. Share state and provincial research priorities



SOURCE REDUCTION & WASTE MANAGEMENT

Simplified subcommittee charge:

1. Identify policies likely to have the biggest impact on reducing identified polymers
2. Identify existing state and provincial policies or campaigns or programs relevant to source reduction and waste management
3. Consider policies already in place that may unnecessarily drive plastic pollution or breakdown of plastic
4. Develop a survey with map interface to crowd-source innovative approaches occurring in non-governmental sectors



EDUCATION

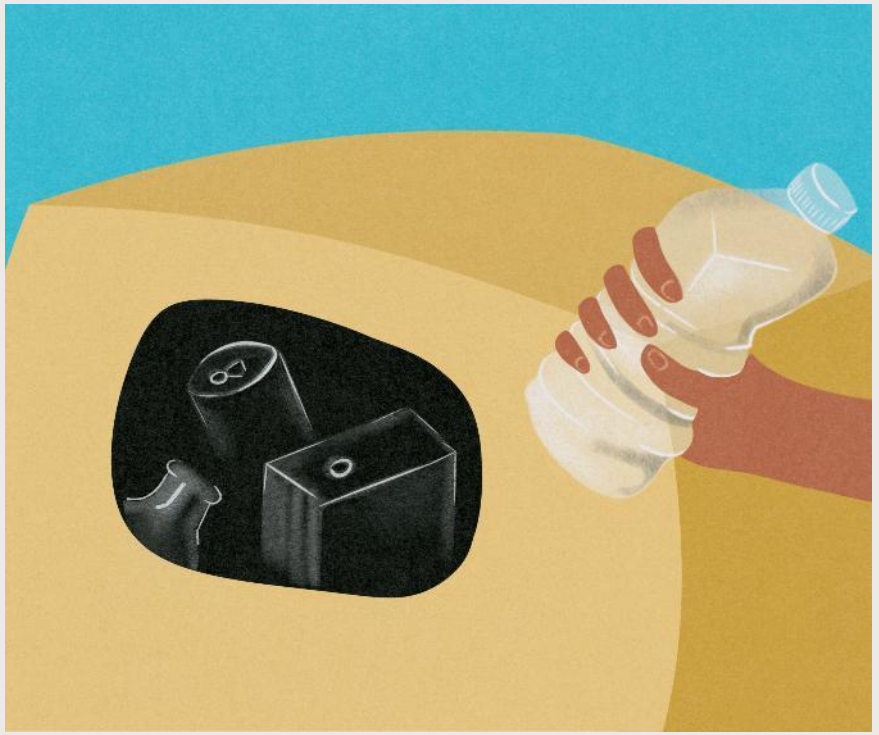
Simplified subcommittee charge:

1. Identify key audiences/sectors for: education, engagement, and partnership
2. Recommend actions necessary to connect with identified key audiences/sectors
3. Consider the feasibility and impact of a future regional public education campaign aimed at reducing sources of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes basin



WRITING PROCESS

- 2-3 subcommittee meetings per month to address charges and draft components of Action Plan
- Subcommittees write objectives plus actions and timelines to complete objectives within each subcommittee category
- Preparing a draft for stakeholder feedback in December



FUTURE PROCESS

- Feedback from December workshop allows for revision of Action Plan
- Present at Great Lakes Commission's semi-annual meeting in March 2027 in Washington DC
- This high-level Action Plan will set stage for future partnerships to address plastic pollution in the region



THANK YOU!

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Great Lakes RESTORATION