

A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries

Facilitating cooperation for more than 30 years—and counting!

THE GREAT LAKES FISHERY is one of the most important freshwater resources on earth. The fishery is worth more than \$7 billion annually to the people of the region, supports more than 75,000 jobs, sustains native fishers, and is the essence of the basin's rich cultural heritage.

This valuable fishery is also shared and managed by two nations, eight states, the Province of Ontario, and several tribes. These jurisdictions are responsible for sustaining the resource for use today and for future generations.

Day-to-day fishery management is the responsibility of non-federal governments – the states, the province, and U.S. tribes. These governments issue fishing licenses, determine harvest levels, stock fish, and improve aquatic habitat. Federal agencies

assist in rehabilitating degraded fisheries and the binational Great Lakes Fishery Commission facilitates this cooperation and protects Great Lakes fish from sea lamprey predation. All together, the work carried out by these governments is highly cooperative, complementary, strategic, and forward-looking.

This degree of cooperation has not always been the case. Until the 1950s, each jurisdiction managed in its own waters, and fishery policies were rarely consistent across boundaries. The fishery suffered from this restrictive mind-set, characterized by limited collaboration.

Today, fishery management on the Great Lakes is more cooperative than ever. To ensure cross-border collaboration, the eight states that border the Great Lakes,

the Province of Ontario, three U.S. inter-tribal agencies, and several federal agencies are signatory to A Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries, a non-binding agreement through which fishery agencies commit to cooperation, consensus, strategic planning, and ecosystem-based management.

The plan allows agencies to leverage resources, avoid duplication of effort, develop shared objectives, and exchange valuable data. The result is one of the world's finest examples of transboundary cooperation. The resource, and the millions of people who use it, benefit from this unique and effective inter-governmental commitment.



The Joint Strategic Plan is rooted in 4 strategies for cooperative fisheries management

Consensus— All agencies must agree before management actions that affect multiple jurisdictions can be initiated. To help achieve consensus, agencies have developed shared fish community objectives for each lake. In the rare instance where consensus cannot be achieved, the plan contains provisions for conflict resolution.

Accountability— Agencies are accountable for implementing joint decisions made under the plan. The plan calls for the production of a decision record through publication of meeting minutes, agency reports, and lake committee reports.

Information Sharing— The plan affirms each signatory agency's commitment to establishing consistent standards for data collection, analysis, access, and sharing.

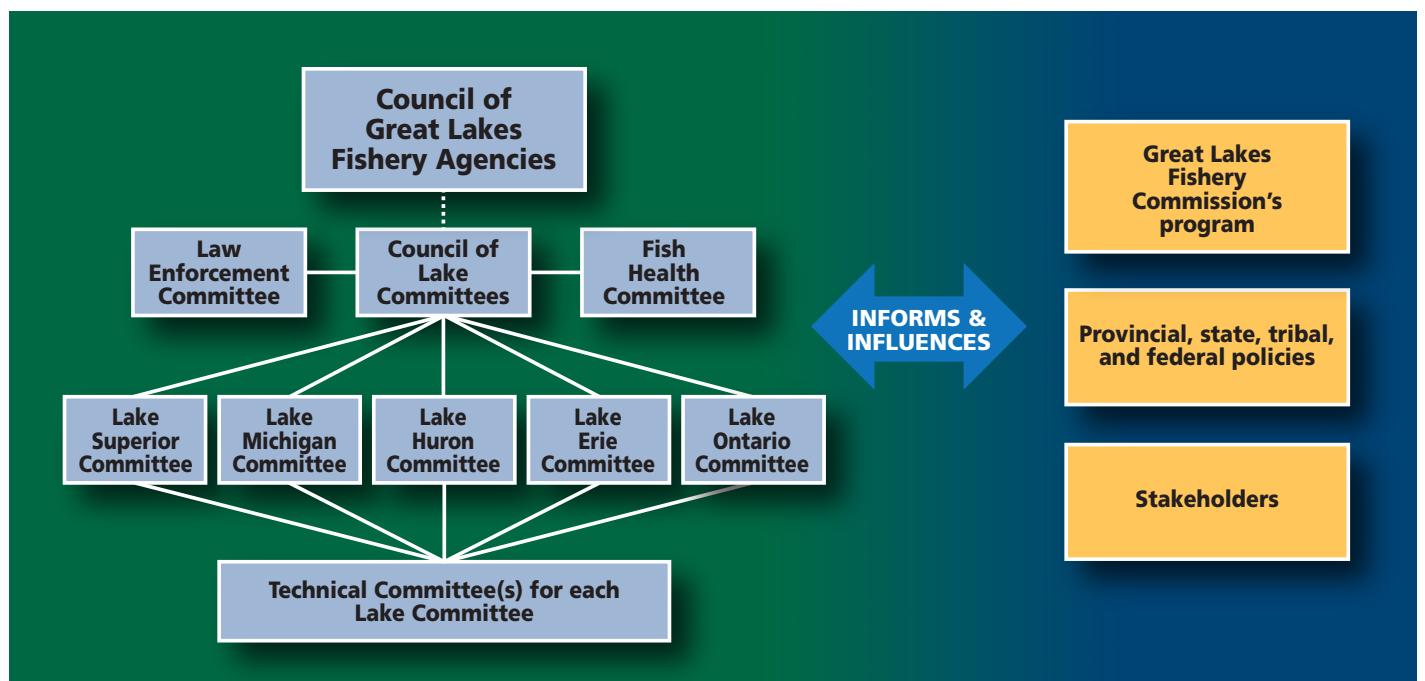
Ecosystem Management— A guiding principle on the Great Lakes is that the resources must be managed as a whole. To facilitate this approach, the plan links fishery managers with environmental interests. For example, fishery agencies coordinate with those implementing the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

Lake committees are the primary bodies under which the plan operates. The Great Lakes Fishery Commission first formed lake committees in 1965 to provide a place for information sharing among agencies. When the Joint Strategic Plan was signed in 1981, the lake committees became the plan's "action arms." Agencies, not the commission, appoint their representatives on the committees.

Lake committees comprise senior officials from state, provincial, and U.S. intertribal fishery agencies. Lake committee members develop shared fish community objectives, establish appropriate stocking levels and harvest targets, set law enforcement priorities, and formulate management plans. Each lake committee has at least one **technical committee**, a field-level body charged with collecting data, producing and interpreting science, and making recommendations to the lake committees.

To address issues of concern to the Great Lakes as a whole, all lake committee members meet as the **Council of Lake Committees**. Other committees, like the **Great Lakes Fish Health Committee** and the **Law Enforcement Committee**, provide specific management advice and information to the Council of Lake Committees. In addition, the **Council of Great Lakes Fishery Agencies**, consisting of high-level fishery management agency representatives (and non-lake committee members, such as federal agencies), ensures plans are created to address the issues of concern.

JOINT STRATEGIC PLAN STRUCTURE



A Short History of Cooperative Fishery Management

By Marc Gaden, Great Lakes Fishery Commission Secretariat

Fishery management on the Great Lakes rests with non-federal governments: eight states, the Province of Ontario, and U.S. Tribes. Federal agencies and the binational Great Lakes Fishery Commission also play a role in Great Lakes restoration.

Although at least two jurisdictions border each Great Lake (seven border Lake Superior), cooperation has not always been high on the agenda. Indeed, starting almost from the time of European settlement in the region, each jurisdiction managed its bordered portion of the lake with little regard for the other jurisdictions. The result was management chaos, overfishing, habitat loss, and fishery decline.

In this parochial atmosphere, cross-border cooperation was non-existent and elusive. Between the late 1800s and the 1950s, the states and Ontario tried no fewer than 40 times to create a lasting mechanism for cooperation, or at least to harmonize their fishery regulations. Two treaties – one in 1908 and one in 1946 – to mandate cross-border cooperation were also proposed but rejected because the treaties gave too much power to a binational commission.

The sea lamprey invasion jolted the jurisdictions out of this insular approach and moved them toward cooperation. The jurisdictions realized that sea lampreys were a basinwide problem and one too big for any one authority to manage. Moreover, federal resources would be needed to overcome the sea lamprey problem. The 1954 Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries – a treaty between Canada and the United States – created the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to control sea lampreys, advance science, and help agencies work together. The 1954 convention succeeded where the other treaties failed because it compelled the commission to address the sea lamprey problem (a problem too big for the non-federal governments to manage) while explicitly denying the commission authority that rested with state and provincial governments. However, recognizing the basin's long history of parochialism, the treaty did direct the commission to establish "working arrangements" among the agencies. The goal was to end the insular approach and instead establish a culture of cross-border collaboration.

Increasingly, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission became a focal point for coordination. This coordination turned routine after the commission created lake committees in 1965 as a place for agencies to share information. In the 1970s, during an era of strategic planning and federal growth in environmental initiatives, Great Lakes states rejected an opportunity to form a U.S.-only coordinating body, known as a Regional Fishery

Management Council under the (Magnuson) Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976, and instead opted to create a Great Lakes version, which would include their provincial counterparts. Agencies asked the commission to help create a strategic institution to heighten their cross-border collaboration. This agreement was the 1981 Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries. The state and provincial agencies agreed to use the existing lake committees as the plan's "action arms" and to make the committees a more robust, strategic process. After court cases of the 1980s re-affirmed U.S. tribal management authority, two intertribal organizations signed the plan and joined the lake committees in 1988 and one joined in 2014.

Through the Joint Strategic Plan, fishery management agencies work together to identify shared objectives, develop plans to meet those objectives, share information, collect and disseminate data, and coordinate law enforcement. The agencies also use the plan to recommend annual total allowable catches for Lake Erie walleye and yellow perch. Federal agencies have also signed the plan and use its structure to work closely with non-federal partners. Although the plan is non-binding, it does create an ongoing mechanism through which the agencies meet regularly and cooperate across borders.

Today, cooperation among fishery managers and scientists is engrained and information routinely flows across borders. Agencies leverage scarce resources and managers sustain robust relationships that allow for ongoing collaboration. The Great Lakes Fishery Commission facilitates this collaboration through strong support for the Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries.



In 1997, representatives from state, provincial, tribal, and federal management agencies gathered to sign a revised Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries.

Adapted from: M. Gaden, C. Goddard, and J. Read. 2012. *Transcending conflict and diffuse political authority*. In: W. Taylor, A.J. Lynch, and N. Leonard [eds.]. Great Lakes fishery management and policy. Michigan State University Press. East Lansing, MI.



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