



Committee of Advisors to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission



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GREAT LAKES FISHERY COMMISSION ADVISORS PASS RESOLUTIONS ADDRESSING MICROPLASTICS AND INVASIVE MUSSELS IN THE GREAT LAKES

WINDSOR, ONTARIO—At the Commission’s 2026 annual meeting in Windsor, Ontario, in early June, the U.S. and Canadian Committees of Advisors to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission came together and discussed myriad issues that impact the Great Lakes fishery. Both committees comprise representatives from various sectors, including Indigenous and local governments, commercial and recreational fishing, academia, environmental interests, conservation authorities, and the public-at-large. The committees regularly meet to share information, discuss issues, and provide input on the management of the Great Lakes fishery. At times, the committees will act as a whole, reflecting shared concerns and opinions among advisors from both countries. This year, the committees passed two binational resolutions affecting the entire basin, described below:

1. A Resolution Calling for the Inclusion of Microplastics as a Chemical of Mutual Concern in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, to Protect the Great Lakes Fishery

The Great Lakes fishery generates approximately USD\$5.1 billion (CAD\$6.9 billion) in economic output each year, supports hundreds of thousands of jobs, and supplies drinking water to approximately 40 million people. Researchers estimate that nearly 10,000 metric tons (22 million pounds) of plastic pollution is entering the Great Lakes every year from the U.S. and Canada. A significant portion of that is microplastics: plastic particles that are 5 mm or smaller that come from the breakdown of larger plastics, manufacturing processes, and everyday products such as synthetic clothing and vehicle tires.

Microplastics do not readily degrade and are mistaken for food by organisms throughout the aquatic food web, serving as a pathway for toxic pollutants to enter the food web and contaminate the fish and wildlife that we eat. A review of Great Lakes fish found microplastic contamination in 28 fish species collected from all five Great Lakes—including lake trout, rainbow trout, and yellow perch—at levels among the highest reported worldwide. Data gaps remain, and the full scope of microplastic impacts on human and environmental health is not yet fully understood. Successfully addressing plastic pollution will require a major, coordinated effort to adopt a comprehensive approach that covers the full lifecycle of all plastics, from extraction to end-of-life.

The United States and Canada entered into the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) in 1972 to cooperate on the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes. The agreement was updated in 2012 to include a Chemicals of Mutual Concern (CMC) framework, which the International Joint Commission (IJC) has recommended for the designation of microplastics under Annex 3. The advisors agree, and this resolution calls on the two federal governments, eight Great Lakes states, and two Canadian provinces to adopt a comprehensive, basin-wide approach to reducing plastic pollution through research, monitoring, policy innovation, education, and market-based instruments. The Advisors urge the Commission to prioritize research on the impacts of microplastics on Great Lakes fish and fully support the inclusion of microplastics as a CMC under Annex 3 of the GLWQA. A copy of this resolution is available online: https://www.glfsc.org/pubs/pdfs/resol2026_1.pdf.

2. A Resolution Supporting the Save the Great Lakes Fish Act of 2025

Invasive mussels—zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) and quagga mussels (*Dreissena bugensis*)—arrived in the Great Lakes from eastern Europe in the late 1980s, transported in the ballast water of ocean-going ships. In the

The Committee of Advisors consists of both U.S. and Canadian representatives from Indigenous, commercial, recreational, academic, agency, and public fishery interests in the Great Lakes Basin. Advisors provide advice to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission; U.S. advisors are nominated by the State Governors and appointed by the Commission. Canadian advisors are appointed by the Commission.

decades since, they have caused widespread ecological and economic damage. Invasive mussels excessively filter phytoplankton—the base of the food web—driving a threefold increase in water clarity and disrupting the life cycles of important forage organisms. They have been associated with avian botulism outbreaks that have killed tens of thousands of birds. Their microscopic larvae (veligers) attach to hard surfaces—boats, docks, rocks, native mussels—costing millions in maintenance and fouling shorelines that support lakefront tourism and recreation

Limited private and public research on controlling invasive mussels in Canada and the United States has shown promise for physical and chemical controls in targeted areas. Though no control method effective at management scale currently exists, the Advisors point to the binational sea lamprey control program as a model. Applying that same framework to invasive mussels is the premise of the *Save the Great Lakes Fish Act* (H.R. 6053), introduced in November 2025 by Michigan Representatives Debbie Dingell and Tim Walberg. The bill would authorize \$50 million annually for 10 years to the Commission to coordinate with federal agencies, tribal, state, and local governments, and the broader scientific community in a structured effort to investigate potential controls for invasive mussels.

The U.S. and Canadian Committees of Advisors call on Congress to pass H.R. 6053 and urge Commissioners to endorse the bill and mobilize partners across the basin in support of a coordinated response to the mussel threat. A copy of the resolution is available online: https://www.glf.org/pubs/pdfs/resol2026_2.pdf.

Dr. Titus Seilheimer, chair of the U.S. Committee of Advisors, said, “What makes these resolutions meaningful is that they are unanimous. Every sector represented on these committees—fishing, science, government, Indigenous, and public—looked at the same information and came to the same conclusion. The Great Lakes can’t wait for perfect information. They need action grounded in the decades of the best available science, and that’s what our advisors are calling for.”

Dr. Tom Whillans of Trent University, who chairs the Canadian Committee of Advisors, added, “These resolutions reflect what our committees do best: look at the evidence, identify the threats, and call for action before the problems grow beyond our ability to respond. Microplastics are already in the fish. Invasive mussels are already in the lakes. Both require coordinated investment now—not after the damage is done.”

“The Commission is grateful to the advisors for their continued diligence on behalf of the Great Lakes,” said Commission Chair Earl Provost. “These resolutions identify priority threats and give both governments a clear signal about where investment and coordination are needed. That is exactly what advisory boards are for.”