

HOME (/)  
ABOUT  
JOURNAL (/ABOUT)  
MASTHEAD (/NEW-PAGE)  
PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS (/PROSPECTIVE-MEMBERS)  
SUBSCRIBE (/SUBSCRIBE)  
STAFF RESOURCES (/STAFF-RESOURCES)  
PUBLICATIONS  
PUBLICATION ARCHIVE (/PUBLICATION-ARCHIVE)  
VOLUME 1 (2009) (/VOLUME-1-2008-2009)  
VOLUME 2 (2010) (/VOLUME-2-2009-2010)  
VOLUME 3 (2011) (/VOLUME-3-2010-2011)  
VOLUME 4 (2012) (/VOLUME-4-2011-2012)  
VOLUME 5 (2013) (/VOLUME-5-2012-2013)  
VOLUME 6 (2014) (/VOLUME-6-2013-2014)  
VOLUME 7 (2015) (/VOLUME-7-2014-2015)  
VOLUME 8 (2016) (/VOLUME-8-2015-2016)  
VOLUME 9 (2017) (/VOLUME-9-2016-2017)  
VOLUME 10 (2018) (/VOLUME-10-2018)  
SYMPOSIUM  
INFORMATION (/SYMPOSIUM)  
BLOG  
FULL BLOG (/FULL-BLOG)  
BLOG ARCHIVE (/BLOG-ARCHIVE-1)  
  
SUBMISSIONS (/SUBMISSIONS)

October 14, 2012 (/full-blog/2012/10/maximizing-great-lakes-international.html)

## Maximizing the Great Lakes: An International Effort & An Interstate Struggle (/full-blog/2012/10/maximizing-great-lakes-international.html)

"Great Lakes Compact" (/full-blog?category=%22Great+Lakes+Compact%22), "Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement" (/full-blog?category=%22Great+Lakes+Water+Quality+Agreement%22), "Great Lakes" (/full-blog?category=%22Great+Lakes%22), "Water Quality Agreement" (/full-blog?category=%22Water+Quality+Agreement%22)



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Image Source ([http://www.glerl.noaa.gov/pr/pr\\_images/basinmap2.jpg](http://www.glerl.noaa.gov/pr/pr_images/basinmap2.jpg))

By: Jessica Durden, Staff Member

The Great Lakes represent one-fifth of the world's fresh surface water supply and cover more than 94,000 square miles of water and 10,900 miles of coastline.[1] A resource of that magnitude demands tremendous maintenance, and nations are once again working together to keep the Great Lakes fresh, clean, and useful.

At the same time, however, extreme drought conditions and population growth are putting strains on the supply.

Canada and the United States recently renewed the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, a joint effort designed to “reduce pollution, cleanse contaminated sites and prevent exotic species invasions.”[2] The Obama administration has requested an additional \$300 million for fiscal year 2013.[3] Canada slashed many of its government science divisions, although Canadian officials pledged their commitment to carry the Agreement out to the full at the resigning.[4]

Just as steps were taken to protect the Lakes, drought and local pollution are forcing communities to request tapping the Lakes. According to NOAA, 39% of the contiguous U.S. suffered “severe to extreme” drought and 55% felt the effects of “moderate to extreme” drought as of the end of August 2012.[5] In response, Waukesha, Wisconsin, a city just outside the Great Lakes Basin that is plagued by high radium levels, approved a letter of intent to buy water from Oak Creek, a Lake Michigan feeder.[6] If Wisconsin state approves the letter, Waukesha’s plan will have to be submitted to the seven states and two Canadian provinces that signed the Great Lakes Compact in 2008.[7]

The Great Lakes Compact was designed to protect the Lakes against poaching by the dry western U.S. states, as they are prone to drought but have experienced marked population growth in recent years.[8] Although it was signed in 2008, Waukesha’s petition would be the first to challenge the Compact.[9] In light of the obvious pollution concerns the Lakes face, and in light of the extreme demand for clean water in growing communities, Waukesha is poised to set a powerful precedent with their petition.[10] The members of the Compact, in conjunction with their related duties to maintain and treat the Lakes’ pollution problem with state and federal dollars under the Water Quality Agreement, will have to tread carefully in considering the petition. Granting or denying the petition demands a team-oriented effort spanning state and international borders; given that the Lakes account for 95% of the U.S. water supply,[11] the Compact’s decision cannot be regarded lightly.

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[1] *Great Lakes Facts and Figures*, GREAT LAKES INFORMATION NETWORK, <http://www.great-lakes.net/lakes/ref/lakefact.html> (last visited Oct. 5, 2012).

[2] *Id.*

[3] *Id.*

[4] *Id.*

[5] *State of the Climate: Drought, August 2012*, NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION (Sept. 17, 2012), <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/drought/>.

[6] Joe Barrett, *Great Lakes Compact Faces First Test*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, (Oct. 3, 2012), <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390443493304578034851099308848.html?KEYWORDS=great+lakes+compact+faces+first+struggl>.

[7] *Id.*

[8] *Id.*

[9] *Id.*

[10] *Id.*

[11] GREAT LAKES INFORM (ATION NETWORK, *supra* note 1.

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