

Great Lakes Water Innovation & Stewardship Exchange

Our Why

The Great Lakes region is North America’s economic engine and holds 20% of the planet’s fresh surface water. As both the guardian of one of the largest freshwater systems in the world and the generator of over \$6 trillion in GDP, the region’s future depends on smart and thoughtful management of the Great Lakes water resources. Our “Why” is to ensure this sacred and life-sustaining natural resource is used wisely and responsibly to protect it for future generations and sustain the long-term economic success of the region.

WISE Vision

The Great Lakes region continues to thrive, with clean, resilient, and plentiful fresh water that sustains its people, its businesses, and its natural heritage. Fresh water is used responsibly with forward-looking management that strengthens the region’s economy, supports sustainable business, and ensures the Great Lakes and their watersheds are protected.

Who We Are

Administered by the Council of the Great Lakes Region (CGLR) and supported by The Water Council (TWC), the Great Lakes Water Innovation and Stewardship Exchange (WISE) is a peer-to-peer network of cross-sector stakeholders operating in the Great Lakes economic region, committed to advancing corporate sustainability performance and best practices.

WISE serves as a forum for accelerating corporate water stewardship, developing effective water sustainability solutions within enterprise operations, and collectively actioning projects that address regional water challenges and opportunities across key sectors in the Great Lakes region. As the Great Lakes system is globally unique, so are the water-related challenges and opportunities facing every sector in the region. WISE is the only forum dedicated to identifying best practices and solutions to the array of enterprise water risks faced by businesses, universities, utilities, and other stakeholders on both sides of the border. It is also the only forum bringing these interests together to help address the watershed protection challenges we face in a region increasingly impacted by a rapidly changing climate, economic activity and development, and the loss of nature.

Value Delivered

Participation in Great Lakes WISE provides a range of technical, educational, and marketing benefits. Through involvement, participants can expect to leverage many of the following for their organizations and their respective sustainability initiatives.

- Knowledge sharing and information exchange on best practices.
- Networking and network-building.
- Introduction and exposure to innovative technologies.
- Brand enhancement by association with commitment to water stewardship.
- Be recognized as an example for others to learn from by demonstrating impact and leadership to sustainable development.
- Public spotlight through the communication of successful projects and initiatives.
- Potential to address material water challenges and opportunities.
- Opportunity to co-create and co-invest in water-focused projects.
- Understand how to improve performance and water management strategies.
- Exposure to sustainability and industry topics and experts in the region.
- Be part of a collective voice that is heard by regional decision-makers.
- Opportunity for thought leadership to be featured on CGLR's Online Great Lakes Economic Forum and webinar series.
- Discount (10%) to the WAVE verification program, and companies who successfully complete WAVE receive a 50% discount on their first year of participation in WISE.

How We Work

- WISE links local and regional water issues and solutions impacting the material and reputational risks faced by WISE participating organizations to global conversations.
- Following the Chatham House Rule, we share non-competitive information and best practice among the peer-to-peer network.
- WISE is a forward-looking platform for regional, solution-focused discussion, exploring collaborative projects and collective action while supporting knowledge-sharing opportunities.
- The WISE Network brings a regional and collective voice to engage with local, state/provincial, and federal governments.
- As a network of stakeholders committed to the WISE vision, we leverage our collective knowledge and influence to advance water solutions and strengthen water stewardship across the Great Lakes region and beyond.
- As dialogue turns into action, WISE will develop working groups to deepen engagement in demonstrable projects.
- WISE is non-partisan.
- WISE is a neutral platform, and commercial promotion or endorsement is avoided.
- All participants agree to adhere to federal and state/provincial antitrust laws. Great Lakes WISE is committed to the competitive process, and discussions or topics that can create antitrust concerns will be avoided.

WISE Structure

- The forum is powered by the Council of the Great Lakes Region (the Secretariat), supported by The Water Council, and collectively directed by the participating organizations.
- WISE meetings take place quarterly, with at least one meeting each year held in person in the Great Lakes region.
- The initial phase of WISE will prioritize dialogue that will identify gaps and key pressure points in advancing corporate sustainability performance and accelerating water innovation and stewardship in the region.
- As the WISE forum grows, more structure will be added and working groups or committees will be formed to support multiple focus areas to be addressed in parallel.
- Creating added value, the formation and implementation of activation projects will be initiated, as determined through WISE's initial phase dialogues and the key gaps identified. These projects will be supported by additional investments and contributions from WISE partners beyond the annual fees.
- Participating organizations appoint primary delegates and their alternatives to participate in WISE meetings and working groups.

WISE Partner Commitments

- Annual WISE fee (supports administration and facilitation).
 - \$350 Non-profit
 - \$2500 Academic Institutions
 - \$5000 Government
 - \$5000 Small-Medium Enterprise
 - \$10,000 Large Company
- Participate in 75% of all meetings.
- Publicly support WISE and promote it across respective networks.
- Commit to being part of the collective WISE movement and supporting projects and collaborations with time and resources where relevant and feasible for your organization. This means further funding and investments for the identified activation projects that will lead to the transformative change and advancement of corporate water stewardship priorities.
- In-kind and/or financial contribution is encouraged to support the development of projects within the first two years of participation in Great Lakes WISE.
- Demonstrate leadership in water stewardship by putting water conservation principles into practice within your organization.
- Alignment with and action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Commitment from the organization's top leadership.
- Adhere to the highest standards of professional ethics and comply with all applicable laws and regulations; commit to anti-corruption and transparency in your business practices.
- Abide by the Chatham House Rule.

Our Focus Areas

Key focus areas will be directed by the participating organizations of WISE. Through dialogue and engagement, critical topics such as the following will be explored.

- Water quality
 - Pollution and toxins (PFAS)
 - Nonpoint source pollution
- Water resource management
 - distribution, access, availability, reuse
 - consumption
 - wastewater treatment
 - stormwater management
 - groundwater monitoring and health
- Data management and data sharing
 - Data baselines
 - Identifying common performance metrics
 - Informed target setting
- Community engagement and partnerships
 - Education
 - Collective action projects
- Technology and engineering strategies
 - Research
 - Innovation and technology deployment

Eligibility

Great Lakes WISE is fueled by a commitment to, and sense of urgency for, safeguarding freshwater resources across the region, particularly the Great Lakes, a globally significant natural resource and watershed in the heart of the region, while strengthening the region's economic success and future. Great Lakes WISE and its network of business, academic and NGO stakeholders value a multi-sector and multi-stakeholder approach to deepening corporate sustainability, fostering innovation, spearheading collective action, and demonstrating stewardship of the Great Lakes.

Businesses have the power to lead by example and can move swiftly and with impact, but they cannot solve water issues and risks alone. Public sector and civil society organizations that can actively contribute to Great Lakes-related solutions needed by businesses are welcome to join Great Lakes WISE alongside the private sector.

WISE aims for a diverse community, with all industries represented that utilize water in their value chain directly or through key sourced inputs. Key industries include, but are not limited to:

manufacturing, automotive, chemistry, agriculture, mining and energy, tourism, health, finance, utilities, retail, property management and owners, etc.

Any business, university or utility headquartered and/or operating in the bi-national Great Lakes economic region and shares this sense of responsibility towards the Great Lakes is eligible for participation in Great Lakes WISE, given they oblige to the [commitments](#) outlined above.

Organizations that are not able to meet the above commitments but are aligned with the WISE vision and want to support the WISE focus areas may contact the WISE Secretariat, CGLR, to explore options for involvement.



Figure 1. Great Lakes Region

The Great Lakes economic region is comprised of eight US states (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York), two Canadian provinces (Ontario and Quebec), and the traditional territories for many Indigenous peoples. It is home to over 107 million people, provides 51 million jobs, and accounts for roughly 50% of all US-Canada bilateral border trade.