

Circular Economy



COUNCIL OF THE
GREAT LAKES REGION
Solving for Sustainability

Embedding circular water economy principles across operations positions your brand as a leader in innovation and sustainability. By treating water as a renewable resource, reducing waste, recovering valuable resources, and regenerating natural systems, companies transform risk into resilience and waste into value. Designing for resource efficiency and closed-loop water cycles demonstrates forward-thinking leadership that resonates with customers, investors, and employees. Leading on circularity today positions organizations at the forefront of a purpose-driven marketplace, where environmental stewardship and economic performance go hand in hand.

Circular Water Strategies: a Model for the Great Lakes Region

The Circular Economy of Water (CEW) offers a transformative approach to water stewardship that emphasizes reducing waste, preserving quality, and regenerating natural systems. By applying circular economy principles to water management, companies in the Great Lakes region have the opportunity to enhance sustainability, resilience, and long-term economic value. The CEW model is scalable, from individual facilities to enterprise-wide planning, and supports both operational and regional sustainability goals.

Grounded in the principles of designing out waste, keeping resources in use, and regenerating natural systems, CEW reframes water as a recoverable asset rather than a linear input. In practice, this means minimizing withdrawals, maximizing reuse, improving water quality, and recovering valuable resources across operations and the value chain.



Business Benefits of Circular Water Strategies

Circular water practices offer high-impact, high-feasibility pathways for companies seeking to strengthen sustainability performance:

Reputational Value

Demonstrating leadership enhances brand credibility and stakeholder trust.

Cost Savings

Efficiency and reuse lower utility and treatment expenses.

Operational Resilience

Reduced dependence on external water sources lowers exposure to supply disruptions and regulatory changes.

Regulatory Preparedness

Early adoption positions businesses ahead of evolving water policies and reuse standards. As water stress grows globally, CEW provides a timely and scalable opportunity for businesses to lead in both sustainability and innovation.

Business Benefits of Circular Water Strategies

Start Small, Scale Smart

Begin with low-cost efficiency upgrades and build toward reuse.

Lean on Partnerships

Work with municipalities, NGOs, and peers to navigate policy and technical gaps.

Communicate Early

Engage employees and communities to build trust and educate around reuse and circular practices.

Align with Local Context

Tailor goals to watershed conditions and regulatory expectations.

Strengthen Governance

Embed water stewardship into procurement, capital planning, and executive oversight.

Call to Action: Incorporate the Circular Economy of Water

A circular approach is the foundation for best practice and provides companies with practical actions to reduce risk, improve efficiency, and enhance water quality across operations and supply chains.

- ❖ **Improve Water Efficiency:** Upgrade fixtures, appliances, and detection systems to prevent avoidable losses.
- ❖ **Reuse Water On-Site:** Treat and repurpose water for non-potable uses such as cooling, irrigation, or industrial processes.
- ❖ **Engage the Value Chain:** Extend water stewardship beyond the fence line by collaborating with suppliers on water risks and dependencies.
- ❖ **Recover Resources:** Capture minerals and materials from wastewater streams to create new economic value.
- ❖ **Adopt Context-Based Targets:** Shape water goals around local watershed conditions and community needs.
- ❖ **Integrate Water into Corporate Strategy:** Ensure executive leadership and cross-functional teams embed water stewardship into decision-making.

Together, these practices reduce consumption, lower energy demands, and cut operational costs, delivering environmental and economic benefits while strengthening long-term resilience.

