

Circular Great Lakes

Launched in 2021, Circular Great Lakes is a bi-national initiative dedicated to advancing a circular economy for plastics across the Great Lakes. Led by the Council of the Great Lakes Region (CGLR) and supported by over 40 cross-sector partners, the initiative works to reduce plastic waste, protect the Great Lakes, and strengthen regional economies.

The Great Lakes are a globally significant freshwater resource, supporting more than 48 million people, thousands of communities, and a \$9.6 trillion regional economy. However, plastic pollution threatens the health of this ecosystem and the prosperity it sustains. Circular Great Lakes is building the infrastructure, systems, and policy frameworks needed to turn the tide, transitioning away from a “take, make, dispose” model and toward a future where plastics are captured, reused, and valued as a resource.

Why Join Circular Great Lakes?

- ✓ **Scalable Solutions:** Projects are designed for replication and regional impact across the U.S. and Canada.
- ✓ **Cross-Sector Partnerships:** Over 40 partners across the Great Lakes economic region, including NGOs, government, academia, and industry, collaborate for systemic change.
- ✓ **Data-Driven Impact:** Initiatives generate actionable data to guide policy, investment, and consumer behavior.
- ✓ **Regional & Global Significance:** Protecting the Great Lakes safeguards drinking water, communities, and economic growth.

Opportunities for Partnership

- ✓ **Join CGLR Programs as a Corporate Activation Partner**
- ✓ **Support on the Ground Projects**
- ✓ **Sponsor capture and cleanup technology through the Great Lakes Plastic Cleanup**
- ✓ **Participate in Webinars and Great Lakes Insights**

[Join Here](#)

Priorities and Projects:

Circular Great Lakes' work is organized around four pillars that together create the foundation for a circular economy. The pillars and their objects, along with program achievements, are highlighted below:

1. Capture & Cleanup

Removing existing plastic litter and waste from the environment.

- ✓ **245,000+** Pieces of litter collected and characterized since 2020
- ✓ **184** Cleanup devices installed or in use across the Great Lakes
- ✓ **112** Cleanups conducted across the Great Lakes watershed in 2024
- ✓ **90** Unique locations cleaned up in 2024

Great Lakes Plastic Cleanup

A first-of-its-kind initiative, co-led with Canadian partner, **Pollution Probe**, deploys innovative litter capture technologies on beaches, marinas, and waterways. Plastics collected are analyzed and tracked, providing critical data to inform policy, research, and consumer awareness.

Dart Stormwater Grant

With funding support from Dart Container Corporation, this grant program funds the purchase and installation of storm drain capture devices to stop plastics from entering the Great Lakes through stormwater systems.

2. Collection, Processing & End Markets

Strengthening material collection systems, creating innovative value chains, and building demand for hard to recycle materials.

- ✓ **95,000+Lbs.** of hard-to-recycle materials collected through pilot programs
- ✓ **16** Implementation partners
- ✓ **5** Strategic partnerships along the plastics value chain

Boat Wrap Recycling

Millions of pounds of plastic boat wrap are discarded annually. This project partners with marinas, recyclers, and manufacturers to collect, recycle, and pilot a **circular solution**: divesting used boat wrap away from the landfill and reverting back into usable material.

Return to Retail

Building on front-of-store and back-of-store plastic film collection programs, this initiative is piloting a hub-and-spoke model to expand recycling of plastic bags, wraps, and films across the region.

Secondary Sortation

Tested the use of **Secondary Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs)** to capture low-volume and hard-to-recycle plastics. In the Greater Chicago area alone, the model demonstrated the potential to recover over **67,000 lbs of material annually**.

Together, we can solve for sustainability and create a future without plastic waste in the Great Lakes region.

3. Consumer Engagement & Education

Educating residents, businesses, and communities about their role in the materials value chain and empowering them to take action.

All of our programs have an integrated focus on Consumer Engagement and Education.

- ✓ **22,000+** Community members reached in the U.S. through outreach efforts since 2021
- ✓ **250+** Community outreach events hosted in the U.S. since 2021

4. Policy Modernization

Supporting and informing smart policies that accelerate the transition to a circular economy.

- ✓ **34** Circular economy-related topics covered in easy-to-understand resources
- ✓ **25** Regional policymakers directly reached thus far

Legislative Outreach & Education

Equipping policymakers and community leaders with the knowledge and tools to shape legislation that reduces plastic waste, advances circular economy principles, and strengthens regional resilience.

