

Collective Action



COUNCIL OF THE
GREAT LAKES REGION
Solving for Sustainability

Collective action creates shared value for businesses, communities, and ecosystems alike. By partnering across sectors to address shared water challenges, companies can drive innovation, strengthen stakeholder trust, and deliver benefits that extend beyond individual operations. Acting now positions your organization as a catalyst for sustainable growth and collaborative impact.

Collective Action: A Cornerstone of Basin Stewardship

Water challenges in the Great Lakes are local, shared, and cross boundaries. Nutrient pollution, algal blooms, aging infrastructure, and CSOs affect multiple communities, industries, and jurisdictions. Because these pressures extend far beyond any single site or property, meaningful progress depends on collective action, coordinated efforts among governments, Indigenous Nations, businesses, utilities, NGOs, and communities to achieve basin-level outcomes.

Effective collective action depends on strong stakeholder engagement. This ensures water decisions reflect local priorities, cultural values, and the rights of those most impacted, especially Indigenous Peoples and historically marginalized groups. Engagement must be ongoing, transparent, and grounded in shared accountability.

Five Key Benefits of Collective Action

1. Maximize Investment Impact



Pooling resources across brands and partners expands reach, reduces duplication, and accelerates basin-scale progress that no single company could achieve alone.

2. Accelerate Uptake of Stewardship Practices



Pre-competitive collaboration speeds adoption of water stewardship in shared sourcing regions by building communities of practice and mobilizing action more quickly.

3. Strengthen Industry Alignment



Collective action reduces the burden on suppliers by replacing scattered, one-off corporate requests with a harmonized, industry-wide approach to water-related expectations.

4. Make Credible, Verifiable Claims



Engaging through AWS-aligned programs enables companies to make trusted, third-party-supported claims about water stewardship performance.

5. Reduce Costs Through Shared Models



Shared project design, implementation, and monitoring lower overall costs and create scalable, replicable approaches across facilities and supply chains.



Corporate Takeaways for Collective Water Action

Shared Challenges Require Shared Solutions



Operational efficiency alone cannot influence basin conditions. Collective action allows companies to align priorities and address root causes, improving water quality, availability, and ecosystem health at a meaningful scale.

Strengthen License to Operate Through Inclusive Engagement



Early, authentic engagement with communities, Indigenous Nations, and local stakeholders builds trust, reduces conflict, enhances permitting outcomes, and strengthens long-term business resilience.

Move Beyond Efficiency to Basin Impact



Stakeholder-informed initiatives such as wetland restoration, green infrastructure partnerships, and WASH projects create measurable basin improvements that reinforce corporate leadership and align with regional goals.

Better Decisions Through Shared Knowledge



Engaging rights-holders and local experts improves risk assessments, enhances the credibility of targets, and ensures initiatives reflect basin realities. Shared data and monitoring deliver stronger, more context-based outcomes.

Governance Matters, Support It. Stronger governance ensures collective action is durable, enforceable, and scalable. Businesses can strengthen collective action by aligning with and supporting basin authorities rather than creating parallel efforts. This includes:

- ❖ Watershed management plans
- ❖ Municipal/state/provincial initiatives
- ❖ Business networks
- ❖ Tribal/First Nations leadership
- ❖ Transboundary coordination

Water Stewardship & Collective Action

Water is no longer just an operational issue. It's a strategic imperative tied directly to business continuity, climate resilience, and shareholder value. Leading companies are elevating water stewardship, investing in efficiency and innovation to reduce risk and unlock cost savings, and setting bold, measurable targets aligned with global standards. By integrating water into financial models and mobilizing the entire value chain, executives can turn a critical risk into a competitive advantage and position their organizations as sustainability leaders.

- ❖ **Champion Water as a Strategic Priority**
Elevate water stewardship to the C-suite agenda—link water risk management to business continuity, climate resilience, and ESG performance.
Invest in Efficiency and Innovation
 - ❖ Commit resources to advanced water efficiency, reuse technologies, and circular water systems to reduce operational risk and costs.
 - ❖ **Set Ambitious, Measurable Targets**
Establish clear water quality and withdrawal intensity goals aligned with SDG 6 and Science-Based Targets for Nature.
 - ❖ **Engage in Collective Action Platforms**
Join multi-stakeholder initiatives in high-risk catchments to scale impact, share costs, and strengthen governance.
 - ❖ **Integrate Water into Risk and Finance Models**
Incorporate water risk into enterprise risk management and capital allocation decisions; explore shared funding mechanisms for catchment projects.
- ❖ **Drive Transparency and Accountability**
Require robust monitoring, reporting, and integrity standards across operations and supply chains to build trust and credibility.
- ❖ **Advocate for Policy and Incentives**
Use your influence to shape regulations and economic incentives that promote water stewardship and resilience.
- ❖ **Mobilize Your Value Chain**
Establish clear water quality and withdrawal intensity goals aligned with SDG 6 and Science-Based Targets for Nature.
- ❖ **Engage in Collective Action Platforms**
Extend water stewardship beyond your operations—engage suppliers and partners to reduce shared water risks.

