
Commonly Asked Questions about the Ecosystem Charter for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Basin

1) Why is the Ecosystem Charter needed?

There are two principal reasons why the Charter is needed. First, many of our laws, programs, policies and institutions support the concept of an ecosystem approach to management in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Basin. However, application of the concept is difficult due to often narrow, single-media or issue-specific mandates. The Charter provides a single, concise and clearly articulated statement that defines goals for an ecosystem approach, and ties a common thread through our many laws, programs, policies and institutions.

Second, citizens, elected officials and even resource managers are increasingly asking the question "Who speaks for the Great Lakes?" Few seem to understand how our many laws, programs, policies and institutions relate to one another. The Ecosystem Charter—through the endorsement process—demonstrates that many agencies and organizations—despite their individual priorities, strategies and mandates—do subscribe to a commonly held set of principles. Thus, the Charter is a valuable educational tool that can explain how concepts of an ecosystem approach can actually be applied by the many public and nongovernmental interests in the Basin.

2) How will my agency/organization benefit from the Charter?

You will benefit in several ways. First, by endorsing the Charter, your agency/organization will be recognized as a "team player" in a Basin-wide partnership that shares common objectives. Second, referencing the Charter can help strengthen your program and project proposals by demonstrating that those proposals address widely held principles and acknowledged unmet needs. Finally, your public policy advocacy efforts can be strengthened by referencing Charter principles consistent with your positions.

3) What is expected of endorsing agencies/organizations?

Those endorsing the Charter are expected to 1) consider Charter principles as guidance when developing work plans and priorities; 2) communicate and cooperate with others, to the extent possible, in pursuing those priorities; and 3) consider the Charter as a means for periodically assessing programs. Those endorsing the Charter are not expected to pursue principles that go beyond the scope of their mandate. Further, they are not required to develop elaborate evaluation or reporting procedures.

4) Will the Charter establish a new bureaucracy and reporting requirements?

No. The Charter is a community effort and is "owned" by all who endorse it. No new organization or reporting requirement will be established. The Great Lakes Commission will provide coordination services over the long term, and opportunities for Charter principles and related actions to be reviewed on a voluntary basis will be identified.

5) Is the Charter a legally binding document?

No. The Charter is a voluntary "good faith" agreement among endorsing agencies and organizations. Simply stated, it is an expression of an agency's/organization's understanding of what an ecosystem approach to management should entail. It provides guidance that the endorsing agency/organization can consider in pursuit of its own mandate. It does not supplant, compete with or otherwise directly influence implementation of existing laws, agreements, policies, etc.

6) How does the Charter relate to existing laws, programs and policies with an ecosystem focus?

The Charter is intended to showcase and advance, rather than compete with, existing laws, programs and policies. An addendum to the Charter will identify and describe documents such as the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, Boundary Waters Treaty, Great Lakes Toxic Substances Control Agreement, etc. The addendum will also describe signatory organizations, each of which will have the opportunity to prepare the text of their own description and include any brief comments on the Charter and its implementation.

7) Does the Charter depart from established policy?

No. The Charter consolidates and summarizes principles found in existing laws, programs and policies. More than 60 documents—ranging from local partnership agreements to global policies—were reviewed to generate Charter language. The Charter is consistent with and, in fact, derived from documents such as the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, Boundary Waters Treaty, Great Lakes Charter, etc. Endorsing the Charter reaffirms an agency's/organization's commitment to existing policies. The Charter is not intended to be a vehicle for introducing new policies, but to concisely present those that have already been widely accepted.

8) Why are the principles as broad as they are?

The Charter is a product of consensus that reflects the input of a very large and diverse set of public, non-governmental and citizen interests. A 35-member Drafting Committee has carefully crafted the document to achieve a fine balance whereby the principles are broad yet meaningful. Individual agencies and organizations are encouraged to interpret the principles and apply them in a way that is most relevant to them. In fact, the breadth of the principles is viewed as a strength of the Charter.

9) Will signing the Charter force my agency/organization to pursue new programs or commit limited resources to new priorities?

No. The Charter is intended to showcase and reference existing ecosystem efforts, while offering guidance as new ones are developed. The endorsing agency/organization is asked only to pursue those principles within its mandate and current priorities. It will encourage, but not require, pursuit of new programs where needed.

10) What does the endorsement process entail, and what is the timeline?

A large number of diverse interests have been invited to participate in the Charter development and endorsement process. These interests range from local watershed organizations to international agencies, and includes governmental units, the private sector and citizen organizations.

Endorsement of, and comments on the draft document (dated April 1994) will be solicited throughout the summer months of 1994. In late summer, all comments received will be considered for incorporation into a final document. The endorsement process will then be continued, and all signatories to the earlier (April) draft, will have the opportunity to review any revisions and reaffirm their support.

A signing event, likely in conjunction with the 1994 Annual Meeting of the Great Lakes Commission (October 25-26, Dearborn, MI) is planned. All signatories will be invited to formally sign the Charter and make a brief statement. This event will officially release the Charter. Efforts to secure additional signatories will continue after that date. Opportunities to periodically review the Charter and associated implementation efforts will be sought, likely through special sessions at large Basin-wide conferences. All signatories will be kept apprised of developments via the Great Lakes Commission as the coordinating organization.

Note: Should you have additional questions, contact the Great Lakes Commission at 313-665-9135 or write to the Commission at 400 Fourth St., Ann Arbor, MI 48103-4816

SIGNATORY RESPONSE FORM

- AN ECOSYSTEM CHARTER FOR THE GREAT LAKES-ST. LAWRENCE BASIN -

INTRODUCTION: The Ecosystem Charter for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Basin is a statement that summarizes commonly held principles for pursuing an "ecosystem approach" to Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Basin management. Any government agency, or non-governmental organization that subscribes to these principles is invited to be a signatory. Signatories agree to use the Charter as guidance in developing their own work plans and priorities, as a means to enhance communication and cooperation with others, and as a means for assessing progress toward a shared vision for the future. The Charter is a non-binding "good faith" agreement; it does not replace or affect implementation of existing laws, agreements and policies. Rather, it showcases these initiatives in the spirit of promoting an ecosystem approach to Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Basin management.

- I endorse the final draft of the Ecosystem Charter (August, 1994) and my agency/organization will be a Charter signatory. Please send details on the signatory process and signing event.
- I would like the following statement to accompany my agency's/organization's name in the Charter addendum. (Please provide a brief statement that expresses your comments on the Charter, how you will use it for guidance, incorporate it into workplans, implementation activities or advocacy efforts, etc.)

Name: _____

Affiliation: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please complete and return by **FRIDAY, September 30**, to:

Great Lakes Commission
400 Fourth Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48103-4816
Ph: 313-665-9135, Fax: 313-665-4370, Email: GLC@Great-Lakes.Net