

# GET THE FACTS: NORTH AMERICA'S GREAT LAKES

## NORTH AMERICAN GREAT LAKES

The North American Great Lakes comprise about 84% of North America's surface freshwater, and about 21% of the world's freshwater supply. They are the second largest source of freshwater on Earth and they supply drinking water to 40 million people. Climate change and humans' land use practices affect the quality of the lakes.

## WHAT ARE THE NORTH AMERICAN GREAT LAKES?

These Great Lakes are located on the northern border of the United States and the southern border of Canada. The lakes from west to east are Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario. There are approximately 35,000 islands in the North American Great Lakes and 176 different fish species.



### Lake Erie

Lake Erie is the smallest in volume, as well as the shallowest, which makes it more prone to effects from urbanization and agriculture. Despite this, it is still the most biologically productive of the Great Lakes. Over 130 species of fish make their home in the waters of Lake Erie.



### Lake Michigan

Lake Michigan is the only Great Lake located entirely within the U.S.



### Lake Ontario

Lake Ontario is impacted by human activities that occur in and around Lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron, and Erie, as it is the most downstream in the chain of the Great Lakes.



### Lake Huron

Lake Huron has the longest shoreline of the Great Lakes.



### Lake Superior

Lake Superior is the largest of the Great Lakes in terms of volume and the most northern of the lakes.



## North American Great Lakes Facts

**84%** of North America's surface freshwater

**21%** of the world's freshwater supply

**2<sup>ND</sup>** largest source of freshwater on Earth

**40** million people's drinking water supply



IMAGE SOURCE: [healthylakes.org/2020-budget-a-win-for-the-great-lakes/](https://healthylakes.org/2020-budget-a-win-for-the-great-lakes/)

## THREATS TO THE GREAT LAKES

Climate change (see Fact Sheet on Climate Crisis and Water Security) threatens the health and vitality of the North American Great Lakes. Heavier prolonged rains have recently been flooding the lakes, creating erosion issues. The heavier rains also cause problems in municipalities that have combined sewer overflows (CSO) (see Fact Sheet on CSOs). Algal blooms are a persistent problem as temperatures rise and rains become heavier. Fertilizers used on land run off into warmer waters and cause algal blooms which suffocate the lakes. (see Fact Sheet on Algal Blooms)

Issues with plastic pollution are a problem across the globe, and the North American Great Lakes are no different (see Fact Sheet on Single Use Plastics). Invasive species also create trouble for the native species living in the lakes by out-competing them for resources.

### SOURCES:

[watershedcouncil.org/great-lakes.html](https://watershedcouncil.org/great-lakes.html)

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[glerl.noaa.gov/pubs/brochures/foodweb/LEfoodweb.pdf](https://glerl.noaa.gov/pubs/brochures/foodweb/LEfoodweb.pdf)



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