

Great Lakes? Not for Long



Leigh Haeger

Map of Great Lakes

The Great Lakes help quench the thirst of 40 million people in the United States and Canada. But this pool of resources may not be around for long. The Great Lakes are in trouble.

A team of scientists recently released a report about the Great Lakes' **dire**¹ state. The lakes are threatened by toxic substances, over fishing, **invasive species**², air pollution, and loss of habitat for wildlife. "The Great Lakes are under tremendous stress," Alfred Beeton of the University of Michigan told reporters.

The report says that concentrating on one or two of the issues won't wave good-bye to the problems. Instead, the scientists wrote, the government needs to look at the entire Great Lakes **ecosystem**. An ecosystem is a community of living things and its environment.

Scientists asked Congress for \$20 billion to help protect the lakes. Experts say the money would be used to clean polluted harbors. Scientists also want to restore **wetlands**, such as marshes and swamps. Because wetlands hold moisture and prevent erosion, they could help the lakes heal themselves.

Something must be done fast, warns Andy Buchsbaum of the National Wildlife Federation. If not, "the damage is likely to be irreversible," he says.

¹ **dire**: warning of disaster

² **invasive species**: plants or animals that spread quickly and damage other plants and animals