

## **Preamble and Proposition**

Coastal and nearshore zones are transitional areas where land, water, and people meet. These areas provide disproportionate ecosystem services supporting human populations, economies, and qualities of life. Many characteristics of the Great Lakes freshwater coast are similar to US marine coasts, in terms of: (1) extensive shoreline; (2) ecological complexity and species richness; (3) large-scale processes that drive the system (e.g., nutrient exchange, energy transfer, and sediment movement); (4) connection with a majority of regional human populations and their qualities of life; (5) generating a world-class economy; and (6) being subject to coastal hazards and multiple stressors.

Following long-term decline in manufacturing and recent national recession, the Great Lakes coastal economy is facing a critical opportunity for re-invention – a re-invention that combines the energy and finances of a resurging coastal economy with today’s environmental ethic. It also provides an opportunity for encouraging and achieving conservation practices for coastal landscapes and their constituent species’ habitats. The national significance of Great Lakes coastal resources has been recognized through such investments as the annual congressional appropriations to Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which provides up to \$300M annually to on-the-ground restoration, enhancement, and protection programs. International and regional significance is also highlighted in the 2012 binational [Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement](#) that calls for increased and explicit emphasis on sustainable management of coastal and nearshore areas.

Wise and sustainable management (i.e., “conservation”) of coastal ecosystems and associated resources will require a diverse assemblage of, and collaboration among, federal, state, tribal, nongovernmental, and private interests. Bringing together that diverse assemblage was the intent of Great Lakes Coastal Conservation Working Group (CCWG) a cross-organizational team initiated in 2013 by the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC). With this charter the CCWG is evolving into an independent, collaborative group outside of the LCC structure: the Great Lakes Coastal Assembly. This new group will continue, and expand upon, coastal conservation efforts started under the LCC.

## **Identity Statement**

The Great Lakes Coastal Assembly (Assembly) envisions coastal landscapes that support the unique structure and processes essential for sustaining healthy species populations, resilient natural communities, and for providing benefits to human society. To achieve this end, the Assembly will work collaboratively with governments, industries, indigenous communities, and non-governmental organizations to align actions around coastal priorities, develop and pursue goals guided by stakeholder desires, and use the best available science to inform coastal conservation strategies.

## **Purpose of the Great Lakes Coastal Assembly**

The purpose of the Assembly is to 1) promote collaborations aimed at management, restoration, and conservation of coastal areas, 2) assist organizations in assessing where investments should be made and aligning investments with regional, state, and local goals, and 3) identify needs for science and

decision support and enable actions that help coastal managers make effective decisions. The diverse team will seek to:

- Catalyze Collaboration -the Assembly will act as a critical convener across coastal organizations, watersheds, and geographic scales;
- Motivate Communication and Inter-organizational Learning – across and among organizations and Great Lakes geographies;
- Amplify Benefits - the Assembly will act to help align entities to deliver conservation strategically such that individual efforts roll up to landscape scale benefits by:
  - Identifying a shared vision - the Assembly will work collaboratively to identify a shared vision and goals for coastal conservation.
  - Promoting actions to achieve that vision (goals/metrics) -the Assembly will work collaboratively to develop specific, measurable goals and promote actions to reach those goals.
  - Tracking and assessment - the Assembly will work to collate activities across agencies to understand results of our actions and assess whether our actions are effective.
- Enhance Efficiency - Identify and develop decision support and tracking tools, supported by the best available science - to reduce effort in prioritizing needs, making decisions, and tracking progress.

**Structure and Governance**

The Assembly is a non-regulatory, voluntary partnership working through cooperative relationships (interactions) among different agents. The Assembly is comprised of coastal and natural resource driven organizations throughout the Great Lakes region. The Assembly supports and does not diminish the authorities and responsibilities of partners or member agencies. It is anticipated that each partner will engage in the objectives and tasks that are important to them and that align with their mission, strategies, and resources.

Table 1. Potential Assembly Member Organizations

State and Provincial Governments	Great Lakes Fisheries Commission
Native American Tribes and First Nations	Great Lakes Commission
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	The Nature Conservancy
US Geological Survey	Ducks Unlimited
US Fish and Wildlife Service	Municipalities
US Environmental Protection Agency	Academia Agents
Environment and Climate Change Canada	Industry Representatives
US Army Corps of Engineers	

### Operating Procedures

- 1) Assembly membership is voluntary and the group will be led by two co-chairs as elected by the membership.
  - a) Organization representatives are expected to serve for at least 2 years.
  - b) Co-chairs will serve a staggered term, for a total term length of 2 years.
  - c) Membership will be reviewed at least annually and co-chairs will invite new members to join as needed.
- 2) Co-chairs will convene teleconference or video calls when necessary for pertinent updates and business that needs input from the group (~monthly). The call schedule is at the discretion of the co-chairs.
- 3) The Assembly will seek to meet face-to-face at least once per year.
- 4) Ad-hoc groups or task teams (e.g., expert panels, technical teams, and engagement teams) composed of Assembly members, or other individuals with relevant expertise, can be established to carry-out specific tasks.

### **Assembly Norms**

- We welcome and encourage **participation** from all partners and will actively seek out their input related to ongoing work.
- We will **educate** new partners that join so that they become fully aware of past, present, and future work, and can effectively integrate into the Assembly.
- We will **communicate the actions** and activities of this group to other people in our organizations to maximize visibility and participation in the Assembly.
- We will **strive for consensus** around decisions, but recognize that may not always be possible, and thus will work towards decisions that all partners *can live with*.
- We will **take action collectively** on agreed-upon decisions to achieve desired outcomes.
- We will **promote transparency** via open, participatory discussions and accessibility of information via decision support and information delivery tools, or other appropriate platforms.
- We **recognize the independence** of participants, respect the autonomy and distinct missions of the organizations they represent, and therefore encourage dissenting opinions, alternate perspectives, creative approaches, and independent thought.
- We will **use the best available** science to improve decision support, recognizing coastal features are unique geographically (e.g., diverse hydrology, soils, landscape cover types) and conservation approaches must reflect these differences.
- We will **identify information gaps** and management assumptions to evaluate, ultimately increasing conservation efficacy.
- We will **avoid duplicating existing work** by coalescing and recognizing ongoing science, design, and planning efforts, and will instead strive to develop connections between and among these efforts.
- We will **stress iterative learning** so that the Assembly is a constantly improving, learning group.
- We will **remain flexible** in the processes deployed to achieve our ultimate goals.
- We will **be active and persistent** in our application of these principles to ensure a vigorous and vibrant community dedicated to coastal conservation in the Great Lakes basin.