

A letter from over 60 organizations urging federal and provincial collaboration to protect the Great Lakes through National Marine Conservation Areas.

August 10, 2022

The Honourable David Piccini
Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault
Minister of Environment and Climate Change
200 Sacré-Coeur Blvd
Gatineau, QC

Dear Ministers,

Re: Call to protect the Great Lakes through the creation of National Marine Conservation Areas

The Great Lakes are a national treasure and an ecological gem in North America, upon which thousands of native species, globally rare plants, animals, and natural communities rely. This ecosystem holds 84% of North America's freshwater supply, is home to over 200 species at risk, and is the source of drinking water for millions of people.

The economic, cultural, and ecological values associated with the Great Lakes are therefore indispensable. And yet, the Canadian waters of the Great Lakes remain largely unprotected. There is, however, an emerging opportunity for positive action to ensure the conservation of the Great Lakes with the establishment of new freshwater protected areas, contributing to the nationwide effort to protect 25% of land and freshwater by 2025.

We are writing to urge your leadership to ensure collaboration between the federal and provincial governments, to advance the establishment of new National Marine Conservation Areas (NMCAs) in the Great Lakes, starting with Lake Ontario.

The NMCA designation is the ideal conservation tool to ensure the waters of the Great Lakes are permanently protected and able to combat increasingly serious threats to biodiversity like climate change, pollution, development, and invasive species. New NMCAs can build on the success of the Lake Superior NMCA established in 2015.



Local communities have been calling for action to advance NMCA designations in the lower Great Lakes (Ontario and Erie), for years. This is because, despite increasing pressure from urbanization and population density in the region, these lake systems continue to be critical habitats for species at risk and migratory birds and butterflies. As the crises of biodiversity loss and climate change converge on the Great Lakes region, safeguarding these strongholds of biodiversity is of the utmost importance.

Eastern Lake Ontario, for example, has long been recognized for its importance to migratory bird species and is home to five Important Bird Areas (IBAs).¹ Prince Edward Point is designated as an International Monarch Butterfly Reserve, and home to a bird observatory to monitor the especially high volume of migratory birds that pass through annually. Across Canada, shorebird populations have declined by 40% since 1970.² Shorebirds, waterbirds and aquatic species at risk rely on healthy and protected waters for their habitats and, in the case of species at risk, for their recovery.

The ecological importance of this region has been recognized already by both the Ontario and Canadian governments as several National Wildlife Areas, provincial parks, and conservation reserves have been established or are being established in this area. **We encourage both governments to take the next steps to establish protections for the waters of this region with an NMCA by initiating a feasibility assessment for Lake Ontario by the end of 2022.**

As part of the feasibility assessment, it is imperative for your governments to engage in meaningful nation-to-nation consultations with local First Nations. The process to establish NMCAs in the Great Lakes must be consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and respect the inherent and treaty rights of Indigenous Peoples in the region.

1 Created by BirdLife International, the IBA designation is granted based on the high population of birds a site hosts including species at risk, endemic species, and migratory birds. They are a significant tool in bird conservation and biodiversity globally, and have helped advance conservation planning in Canada and bird monitoring.

2 The State of Canada's Birds, 2019: <http://nabci.net/wp-content/uploads/2019-State-of-Canadas-Birds-1.pdf>

Our shared hope is that moving an NMCA forward for Lake Ontario can be the first step in a broader protection agenda for the Great Lakes and that NMCAs will be actively pursued for Lake Erie and Lake Huron. The Great Lakes basin is home to hundreds of species at risk and critical habitats in Ontario. For many living in Ontario, the Great Lakes foster a love for nature and it is critical that these ecologically and culturally significant ecosystems are preserved for future generations and to help halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity that threatens our collective future

There are few opportunities to protect large areas of nearby nature in Southern Ontario, and creating freshwater NMCAs in the Great Lakes is an exciting one that we urge you both to seize, starting with Lake Ontario. We offer our full support to help advance this work, and look forward to seeing NMCA designations established in all the waters of the Great Lakes by 2025.

Sincerely,



SIGNATORIES



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Anarres Natural Health	Kingston Field Naturalists
Bee City Canada	Land Conservancy for Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington
Bert Miller Nature Club	Nature Barrie
Bird Friendly London	Nature London
Black Environmental Initiative	Niagra Falls Nature Club
Blooming Boulevards	Norfolk Field Naturalists
Blue Dot	North Durham Nature
Build the Park	Ocean Park Beautification Committee
BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association	Ontario Biodiversity Council
Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation	Ontario Headwaters Institute
Community Matters Toronto	Ontario Nature
Deep/Quest 2 Expeditions	Our Future First
Echo Ecological Enterprises LTD	Pelee Island Bird Observatory
Essex County Field Naturalists	Point to Point PEC Foundation
Folkes Construction Inc	Prince Edward County Field Naturalists
Friends of Charleston Lake Park	Prince Edward County Lions Club
Friends of Kingston Inner Harbour	Providence Centre for Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation
Friends of Sandbanks	Quinte Field Naturalists
Friends of South Shore	Religious Coalition for the Great Lakes
Friends of the Salmon River	Rideau Waterway Land Trust
Friends of the Spit	Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre
Friends of Wellers Bay	Saugeen Nature
GentleWays for OurPlanet	Save Our Lighthouses
Hamilton Naturalists' Club	Scientists in School
High Park Nature	South Shore Joint Initiative (SSJI)
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC	

SIGNATORIES

Surf the Greats

Swim Drink Fish

The Kensington Conservancy

The Land Between

The Water Institute at the University of
Waterloo

Thousand Islands Watershed Land Trust

Toronto Ornithological Club

W Booth School of Engineering Practice
and Technology at McMaster University

Water Watchers

Waterloo Region Nature

West Lake Community Association

Willow Beach Field Naturalists

York Region Environmental Alliance

York Simcoe Nature Club