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Shared waters: Canada - United States

Canada and the United States share many waterways, from the Great Lakes, which are among the world's largest bodies of freshwater, to rivers that mark or cross the border between the two countries. These transboundary basins (see map below) are home to the majority of the Canadian population, with much of the economy directly dependent on the industrial, agricultural, transportation, and recreational benefits these water resources bring. Decisions made within the water basins of one country can have consequences for the other. This places a premium on effective governance institutions for both countries.



Canada-United States Transboundary Basins.

Canada is a signatory to several treaties and agreements with the United States dealing with waters which flow along or across the common boundary. These include:

Treaties and Conventions

- [Boundary Waters Treaty](#) (1909)
- Lake of the Woods Convention and Protocol (1925)
- Rainy Lake Convention (1940)
- Niagara River Water Diversion Treaty (1950)
- Columbia River Treaty (1961) and Protocol (1964)
- Skagit River Treaty (1984)

Agreements

- St. Lawrence Seaway Project (1952)
- [Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement](#) (1972, 1978, 1987)
- Water Supply and Flood Control in the Souris River Basin (1989)

The Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 established the [International Joint Commission](#) and set the basic principles for guiding boundary water relations between Canada and the United States.

The IJC helps anticipate, prevent, and resolve disputes between the two countries in an independent and impartial manner. It also provides a mechanism for cooperation and coordination in managing shared waterways and in investigating environmental issues of mutual interest along the border. This includes issuing Orders of Approval in response to applications for use, obstruction, or diversion of boundary waters; establishing boards for managing levels and flows of boundary and transboundary waters or for monitoring and assessing water quality in these waters; and carrying out investigations at the request of Canada and the United States to better understand an issue and to make recommendations to governments.

The IJC also plays a special role in advising governments and in monitoring and assessing progress under the Canada-United States Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. This agreement between the two countries is implemented in collaboration with the province of Ontario (through the Canada-Ontario Agreement) and Great Lakes states, with a view to restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Great Lakes basin.

A list of [current boards and task forces](#) reporting through the International Joint Commission are available on the IJC's Website.

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