Submitted: Emily B – April 2, 2026

IJC Progress Report of the Parties 2025/Great Lakes Perspectives

To: Allison Vogelsang Zenatti, Pierre Baril, Robert Gioia, Gerald Acker et al., International Joint Commission
Dear Sirs, Madams et al:

Thank you very much for holding these perspective sessions and giving the chance to comment. I apologize in advance for anything my attempt at land and water acknowledgment that I fumbled or missed: I acknowledge living on and near territory of the Three Fires Confederacy (Ojibwe/Anishinabe, Odawa and Bodawadomi), Miami and other tribes, largely unceded (though I am not fully familiar with the ceding status in my area) primarily in the watershed area of Gichi-Wiikwedong and other parts of Ininwewi-Gichigami (thank you for providing the names for the lakes and bays on the maps in your webinars, by the way).

My name is Emily Baker. I am not writing on behalf of any one organization, but there are many which I will draw attention to in this comment, and I hope you will consider contacting the people connected to them.

I listened to the recordings and browsed through the Progress Report of the Parties since the webinars were held. Largely it looks pretty good. In answering the questions posed to the people commenting, I will point out particular successes I appreciate, and ways things could improve or change.

In my opinion, the authors of the reports could stand to acknowledge any current national, industrial and/or geopolitical situations that threaten to hinder or outright undo progress on Great Lakes protections and care, but I do appreciate see- ing good news on many fronts even in the face of all that. With that, I will proceed to address the questions:

1. How have changes in water quality impacted you?

By and large we have been lucky where we live. As the State of the Great Lakes report (shown in one of the webinars) delivers in its “Fair” verdict of Lake Michigan, there are definitely still problems there related to invasive species and their impact on various parts of Lake Michigan's food web.

Through the past several years, I definitely observed goby die-offs as large as the prior alewife die-offs along the shores, and some shorebird deaths here and there, and plenty of dreissenid mussel shells on the shore, and mus- sels on rocks in the water while swimming, and the periods between high clarity and Cladophora/other algal blooms. We also lost some ash trees, in no small part to ash borers (mentioned in the 2025 Progress Report of the Parties, pp. 87-8), and since I enjoy eating fish, I would feel concerned about the losses of whitefish and walleye especially, and I know that the mussels (ibid. 25-6) and ensuing loss of prey (p. 104 talks about the increase of mysids in whitefish diet with the loss of Diporeia) are a big part of that, as well as for the clarity and ensuing periphyton growth mentioned in the last Great Lakes Perspectives lecture (IJC, 26 March 2026, 35:00-35:50)

I also observed plenty of erosion on the dunes heading towards Frankfort, which one could attribute to the recent intense weather patterns, and more people had built metal walls (we had tried building up a wooden wall) to try and combat that and any erosion from lake levels from some years back. I appreciate the interest

in citizen observations (Ibid., 17:42), and it would be helpful if both countries could coordinate and share data from such efforts going on (Ibid., 1:100:14).

I imagine any chemical situations, including PFAS and Mercury, could easily be cause for concern in the years to come. I was encouraged to hear about the different efforts; I am familiar with the Eat Safe Fish guides (ProtP, 2025, 13, 20-21), and I appreciate the MPART mention (p. 34).

2. What would you change to achieve progress on Great Lakes water quality?

Given a “magic wand”, as you put it in the webinars, where would I even begin? If I were to list it on the grand scale, they would include many things:

Repealing the part of a 1977 treaty that supposedly grants impunity to Canadian oil and gas companies to transport their products through the boundary watersheds, or making it more watertight when it comes to the public trust.

Instantly having economically viable and widely marketed and subsidized alternatives to petroleum-based products, including fuels, plastics, cosmetics, topical lotions and creams, fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and so on, that would not require extracting from or transporting through sensitive areas, deforestation or filling in wetlands, under-compensated and unprotected labor, harmful by-products in communities, etc., and use more practices that reclaim discarded materials, give more to the land and water than they take, and so on, or at least listing feasible ways for everyone to reduce usage of the usual products in their lives until alternatives are available in their areas and price ranges, and enough trust was inspired, as per Fast Company's recent article and Christine Taylor's post on it (Taylor 2026).

Having leaders who would listen to your recommendations and see the value in them, more than they do industrial leaders who believe they and their businesses can only thrive if pollution permissions were returned to before any organizations meant to regulate them existed at all, and if people don't know or care what harm their products and what produces them could cause, or would at least allow states to maintain stricter standards than they them- selves want on behalf of the companies lobbying for them, and ways to engineer paradigm shifts in people whose lives were inextricably tied to the works of those industries thus far.

However, if you only speak of things that are actually in my power and ability to change, or only focusing on a local scope, I would like more attention drawn to, and more collaboration with, local efforts to make the kind of progress you hope for despite what the larger-scale rollbacks might throw in their way. I will happily name a few groups operating in my part of Michigan and wider areas:

- Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities (groundworkcenter.org)
- FLOW Water Advocates (the two above are connected to many other programs)
- Grand Traverse Watershed Center (gtbay.org)
- The Discovery Pier (discoverypier.org), and their planned Freshwater Research and Innovation Center (freshwatercenter.org)
- Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy
- Benzie Conservation District

I would also recommend talking to the binational Freshwater Future organization; they recently held a "Freshwater Heroes Awards" summit at the start of April. They no longer record their sessions for safety reasons, but I highly sug- gest you ask the people on it to share the stories about the people and groups they nominated, who would be good to network with on different issues. For instance, Dr. Sandy Greer (IJC, 2026 March 25, 37:37) would enjoy connecting with Northwatch and Michigan Against Atomic Waste.

3. Looking ahead three years, how do you imagine water quality changes will impact how you live, work, play and engage with the Great Lakes?

It largely depends on factors that would not be entirely in my control. Would Michigan be able to hold to or expand the MI Healthy Climate Plan (PRotP, 2025, 100-101) or protect public lands from being harvested or sold like they are out west (Pattiz, 2026, March 31), in the face of current demands from larger federal sectors and the businesses connected to them, many members of whom seem to underestimate the interconnection of watersheds and terrestrial ecosystems, assuming they care about them at all, and who certainly have a lot of money to burn to convince others to go along with it? Along with the oil companies, the demand for massive data centers in the area and building or reopening gas, coal and/or nuclear plants are cause for concern. Planet Detroit (planetdetroit.org) covers any number of those issues.

To lean into a more hopeful trajectory, I should hope to see more expansion and coordination between different organizations, whether in advocacy, citizen science, or other situations. Fostering further connection between other groups around the Great Lakes would be invaluable, and could expand further into this, even in the face of push- back. If you wanted to add information in your next report about the quality of, say, the Boardman or Betsie River, contacting the Watershed Center and the Benzie Conservation District would help.

I was impressed with the respect that you showed all the speakers, not only the lecturers, but also the people who spoke during the comment section, including Joe in the last session (IJC, 2026 March 26, 54:53). It reflects what the progress report details of relations with Indigenous groups, for instance the mentions of CORA (PRotP, 2025, 22) and expansion of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in the CSMI (Ibid., 105). I hope you can continue that momentum with them, and with other groups of people needing and giving strong advocacy for environmental justice. There is increasing need to go beyond treating them as stakeholders and rather treating them like partners and providing welcome spaces for them, as per a recent piece for the University of Minnesota's Institute on the Environment (Kufeyani 2026; see also Hellman (2026) and C. Anderson's response to it).

All told, I would like to see myself taking a more active role to protecting this freshwater area that is too easy to take for granted. I had helped out in some of NOAA's Great Lakes-related programs years ago, including the GLANSIS database (PRotP, 2025, 76-77), and volunteered with some of the groups, including sampling benthic macroinvertebrates in streams with the Benzie Conservation District. I would welcome a chance to assist more in local efforts to protect the Great Lakes, whether as an employee or volunteer at one of those places, a citizen sci- entist, or simply raising my voice, perhaps even all of the above. hopefully I will find such opportunities that I could easily access, and I hope you will consider my previous suggestion to contact them and other organizations they know to coordinate shared efforts in research, protection, restoration, advocacy and change.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share. Sincerely,

Emily

Works Cited

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