



BECCA NELSON | PICTURED ROCKS



Ensuring the Healthy Future of Our Waters

MISSION:

Freshwater Future is a catalyst for community action that strengthens policies designed to safeguard the waters of the Great Lakes region.

VISION:

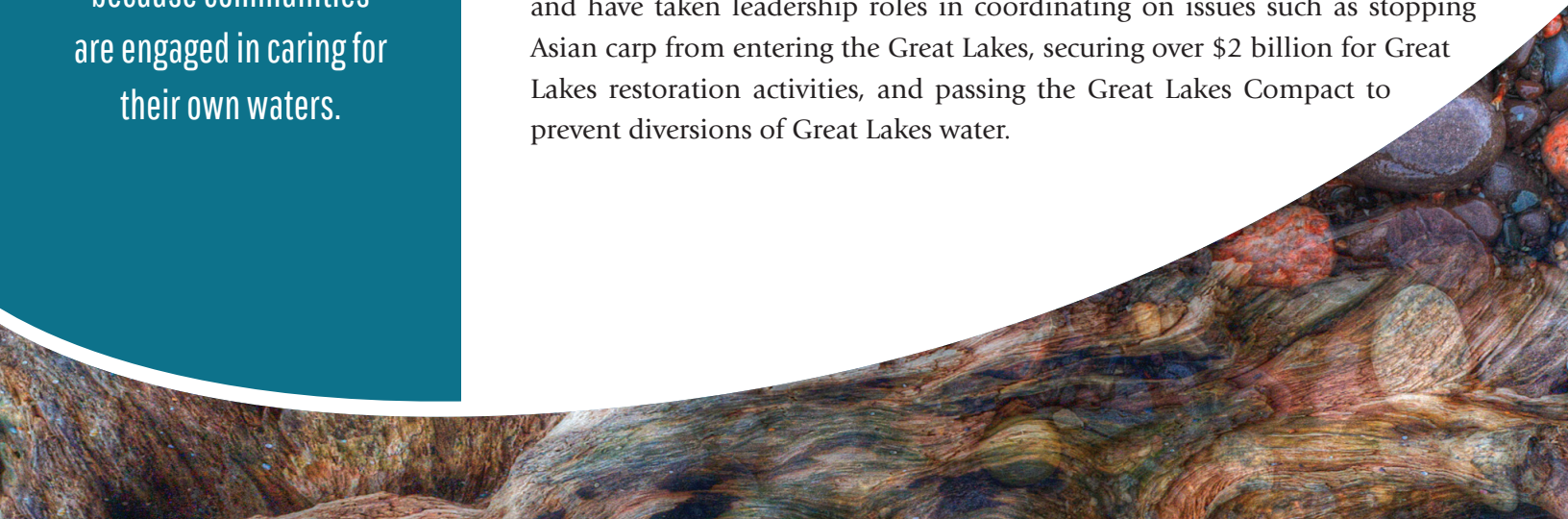
The waters of the Great Lakes region are healthy and provide safe drinking water, beaches for swimming, and fish that are safe to eat, because communities are engaged in caring for their own waters.

Strategic Plan 2017

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS: We believe that in order to achieve this vision, several conditions need to be in place:

- A strong and effective environmental community working to protect and restore the Great Lakes and its many waters;
- Coordinated initiatives on critical restoration and protection issues among groups that result in effective solutions to the complex problems impacting water; and
- Residents empowered to participate in civic decision-making about their own water resources.

METHODS: Freshwater Future's role in putting these conditions in place is as a catalyst for change in communities across the Great Lakes region. We help create and strengthen community action on water by providing grants and professional development services to over 2,000 community groups working on local issues impacting their water. Through this engagement with groups, we learn of and track emerging issues that impact many communities in the region, and are able to synthesize those concerns into strategic policy solutions. We elevate the voices of many communities to the state, provincial and federal level where policy change happens. We champion the causes of communities and have taken leadership roles in coordinating on issues such as stopping Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes, securing over \$2 billion for Great Lakes restoration activities, and passing the Great Lakes Compact to prevent diversions of Great Lakes water.





IMPACT: For over 20 years, Freshwater Future has provided funding, professional development, and a rich network of support to citizens' groups in communities across the Great Lakes region.

Freshwater Future has provided over \$3,000,000 in funding through more than 1,000 grants for work in both the United States and Canada to protect the health of our waters. As a result, Freshwater Future grantees and partners have protected thousands of acres of wetlands from imminent destruction, restored thousands of feet of shoreline along rivers and lakes, and made communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Equally as important, our grantees have achieved these results through deep engagement in the democratic process, strengthening community bonds along the way.

VALUES: Freshwater Future is a collaborative and entrepreneurial organization that seeks perspective from diverse communities and individuals, builds partnerships and collaborations, works to ensure equity in the solutions we advocate, and values residents' knowledge and abilities in our work to protect and restore the health of the Great Lakes for current and future generations. The waters of the region that define our sense of place include the five Great Lakes, but also include the critical connecting waters such as inland lakes, rivers, wetlands and groundwater. We protect these waters for their many natural benefits such as: fish and wildlife habitat, intact ecosystems and an amazing 20% of the Earth's fresh surface water, but also for their benefits to people: clean drinking water, fish that are safe to eat, and beaches that are safe for swimming.

STRATEGIES:

Grow — *Increase the strength and effectiveness of organizations dedicated to protecting and restoring our waters.*

The more than 2,000 groups that we work and communicate with regularly vary in size and scope of work, but one thing most have in common is that they would like to grow their capacity and effectiveness. To accomplish this, we utilize over 120 years of collective nonprofit and water protection experience of our staff to provide assistance to these groups on topics such as board development, fundraising training, planning, communications, data management, financial management and more.

- Provide customized consulting services that increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency.
- Build cohesive narratives around issues so that both individual organizations and collaborations can better advance policy solutions.
- Develop new or modified consulting programs that help clients address needs for working with communities of color, ensuring equitable outcomes from their work and creating inclusive organizations.



Support — *Improve the ability of communities to carry-out water protection and restoration projects by filling gaps in financial resources and policy solutions.*

Community-based groups often have the local knowledge and passion to protect their waters in ways that distant organizations, agencies, and governments cannot. In order to succeed when threats or opportunities arise, these groups often need financial resources and assistance with understanding the legal and policy landscape of their issue. Freshwater Future provides these resources through our grants programs, information about other sources of funding, and by bringing those local concerns to policy discussions and decision-makers. Often we can provide or connect groups with data and/or research that is helpful for their local initiatives.

- Provide financial resources to groups and projects that help them implement on-the-ground solutions as well as empower their organizational growth.
- Catalyze critical policy change efforts by tracking emerging issues, synthesizing common concerns, and convening diverse groups to develop policy solutions.

Connect — *Deepen connections and information sharing between organizations working around similar geographies and key issues.*

The multitude of groups working to protect water resources in the region shows the importance of these issues to residents. These groups also cover specific geographic areas, water bodies, and issues impacting water that are important to ensuring the future health of the region. However, this strength has not yet been fully realized due to the difficulty of coordinating among such a wide variety of groups. To meet this need, Freshwater Future has helped to create and lead the Great Lakes Network as a coordination and collaboration tool to organize efforts across the region. We will continue to utilize the network as a way to focus and grow the strength of the many groups in the region.

- Coordinate the Great Lakes Network as a platform for information exchange, goal alignment, and self-organizing projects that address water issues.
- Facilitate new connections among organizations by leveraging the existing Freshwater Future policy clusters through the Great Lakes Network.

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Thrive — *Increase the sustainability of Freshwater Future and its mission related programs.*

Ten years ago, Freshwater Future became a standalone nonprofit, after having been incubated for eleven years by another organization. Since that time, we have grown in a variety of ways, including a fourfold increase in our budget and staff size, successful new programs like the Great Lakes Network, four new granting programs, and expanding our work bi-nationally by creating our sister organization, Freshwater Future Canada, a Canadian charity. This growth has required an entrepreneurial spirit, board and funder engagement, and outstanding constituent participation. We view the next five years as an opportunity to continue to grow through internal analysis and by following procedures, policies, and practices to ensure success as we respond to new program needs, changes in the world, staff and board transitions, and financial opportunities that arise.

- Ensure smooth transitions of staff and board members into and out of the organization and strategically recruit new people to meet specific needs.
- Make decisions that ensure our work is informed by the diversity of residents in the region, works toward equity of outcomes across that diversity of residents, and ensure our staff, board, volunteers and constituents reflect that diversity.
- Increase capacity for Canadian program implementation.
- Increase revenue to support operations from diverse sources.

Adapt — Because the problems we work to solve are complex and change over time, we utilize an adaptive planning framework. As such, this plan articulates the results we are working to achieve, sets the broad strategies we will utilize to reach them, and outlines objectives under each strategy. We will select the activities to achieve these objectives through measurable short-term action plans that will be adapted as necessary based on changing circumstances, problems and new information.

Process — We developed these strategies through a process of consultation and collaboration with our key stakeholders and constituents. Their input and guidance resulted in a shared understanding of our strengths and opportunities to catalyze and foster a network of community action to vigilantly protect our Great Lakes waterways.



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