

# DITHERING ON DIVERSIONS: GREAT LAKES ANNEX, ROUND TWO

Last summer, the Council of Canadians joined citizens in Canada and the United States to criticize the Great Lakes Annex 2001 agreements. Designed by the governments of Ontario, Quebec and eight U.S. states, the agreements would govern water diversions from the Great Lakes, the largest freshwater ecosystem in the world, and a source of drinking water for 40 million people.

Although the Annex was originally intended to stop water diversions from the Great Lakes, the Council of Canadians maintains that it would do the opposite – jeopardizing the well-being of our Great Lakes. Citizens from across the country took action on this issue, sending a clear message to the federal government that water diversions are unacceptable.

Tens of thousands of Canadians signed our petition, calling on the federal government to stop diversions from the Great Lakes and protect our waters. Indigenous peoples on both sides of the border – whose rights have been ignored in these negotiations – came together to form the United Indian Nations of the Great Lakes, to defend their interests as indigenous peoples in the region and to protect the waters.

In February, environmental organizations united in Wingspread, Wisconsin, to demand a prohibition on water diversions from the Great Lakes basin. And Council of Canadians chapters in the Great Lakes region led the charge by packing public meetings and passing municipal resolutions in their communities to oppose water diversions.

This summer, the draft Annex agreements will be re-released for public comment. At the time of this writing, it is unknown if any changes have been made to the agreements to protect the waters. But there are many reasons for Canadians to pay attention to these agreements and to take action:

**We cannot allow water to be diverted from the Great Lakes.** Even if the revised Annex prohibits diversions, exception clauses could leave the door open to significant large-scale water withdrawals. Only one per cent of the water in the Great Lakes is considered renewable, and water loss could have drastic repercussions to lake ecosystems and to Great Lakes communities.

**Water must remain in the public trust.** The first draft of the Annex makes no distinction between water uses inside and outside the water basin. This leaves the door open to long-distance water removals, in addition to water exports and commodification. Any agreement must close the door on bulk water exports, protecting water as a public trust for people and for nature.

**The federal government has a responsibility to protect Canada's waters.**

By allowing Ontario and Quebec to enter into an agreement with U.S. states, the Annex undermines Canada's responsibility over Great Lakes waters. This could erode the government's authority over all of Canada's shared waters. Any agreement must reinforce existing international laws and jurisdiction over the Great Lakes.

Canada's waters are being threatened by diversion, contamination and commodification. While Canadians are coming together to protect the waters, our government continues to dither on these issues. The federal government hasn't updated its federal water policy since 1987. It's time for a national debate on water issues in this country. We must demand that Ottawa finally act for Canada's waters.

**To take action to protect the Great Lakes and all of Canada's waters, visit [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org).**

**Sara Ehrhardt is the Water Campaigner for The Council of Canadians.**

## DIVERSIONS AND DEVIL'S LAKE

Water issues are heating up along the Manitoba-Ontario-North Dakota border, and the Canadian government is failing to protect Canada's waters.

It all springs from two projects on the table in North Dakota. One would divert freshwater from Lake of the Woods, Ontario, into North Dakota, and the other would divert salt water from Devil's Lake, North Dakota, into Manitoba. The Council of Canadians condemns both of these projects and demands that our federal government take action on these issues.

Diverting water out of Canada into North Dakota could affect Canada's freshwater resources, and the Devil's Lake diversion project would pollute Canadian waters, violating international law and further jeopardizing the health of Lake Winnipeg and Canadian ecosystems. The Devil's Lake diversion is a unilateral U.S. action that has been condemned by the Manitoba government and by environmentalists on both sides of the border.

The Council of Canadians is joining Friends of the Earth Canada in demanding that the Canadian and U.S. governments refer the Devil's Lake diversion issue to the International Joint Commission. For more information and to take action, please go to [www.foecanada.org](http://www.foecanada.org).