

Protecting the Water *Who are the Water Walkers?*

Biinaagami

The title of this Giant Floor Map was chosen with great intention.

The name Biinaagami was gifted by Elder Barbara Nolan of Garden River First Nation and Elder/Gezit Donna Debassige of Anishinabek Nation, both water protectors. In Anishinaabemowin, the language of the Anishinaabek Peoples, Biinaagami can be interpreted as “clean water.” Biinad means something is clean, while aagami comes from another part of a word referring to the state of a liquid. “When it’s clear,” explains Nolan, “it’s Biinaagami.”

Biinaagami was chosen for the map to highlight our shared responsibility to the Great Lakes, one of the largest groups of lakes on Earth containing 21% of the world’s most accessible fresh water. The Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island (North America) recognize that water is a sacred gift that sustains and connects all forms of life — without clean water, all life will perish. No matter where we call home, we all have a role to play in protecting the health of the planet’s water systems from pollution, drought and waste, including the smallest of rivers all the way up to the greatest of the Great Lakes.

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Anticipation Worksheet

Read each of the following sentences and think about whether or not you agree with what is being said. Place a mark on each of the lines to show your level of agreement. Explain your choice in a sentence or two.

1. Water is essential to all living things on the planet.

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

Explanation:

2. Access to clean water should be a basic right for all living things, human and non-human.

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

Explanation:

3. Water conservation and protection is everyone's responsibility.

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

Explanation:

4. One person's actions can make a difference in the world.

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

Explanation:

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Giant Floor Map Information

Languages

The language data for Indigenous languages currently spoken today is taken from the 2016 Canadian census. Information on Indigenous languages no longer spoken today reflects the extinction of those languages due to a lack of fluent speakers, and comes from the UNESCO Atlas of World's Languages in Danger (based on data from the Statistics Canada 2006 Census), Native-land.ca, and census data from the United States and Canada, and source information from individual First Nations.

Reserves

A reserve is land set aside for a First Nations Band through a contract with the Canadian state ("the Crown"). Reserves are governed by the Indian Act, and residence on a reserve is governed by band councils as well as Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. *Source: Historica Canada, Reserves, the canadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aboriginal-reserves/; Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc., ictinc.ca/blog/8-first-nation-reserve-faqs; Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, canada.ca/en/crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs.html.*

Reserve parcel

A reserve parcel is an area of land where the legal title is held by the Crown (Government of Canada), for the use and benefit of a particular First Nation. It is an add-on to an existing reserve. *Source: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, Land Management, aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/110_0100034737/1100100034738*

Indian reservation (United States)

An Indian reservation is the American equivalent of a Canadian reserve. It is an area of land reserved for a tribe or tribes under treaty or other agreement with the United States, executive order, or federal statute or administrative action as permanent tribal homelands, and where the federal government holds title to the land in trust on behalf of the tribe. *Source: U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs, Frequently Asked Questions, gov/frequently-asked-questions*

Band offices

A band office is the center of operations for a band that is part of a tribal council. *Sources: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, Tribal Council Funding Program Policy, aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1452105267433/1452105343369*

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Treaty boundaries

Treaty boundaries outline historical treaties that were made between 1701 and 1923 between Indigenous Peoples and the Government of Canada and modern treaties which are created when Indigenous Peoples' claims and rights to the land have not been addressed by treaties, or other legal means. *Source: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028574/1529354437231*

Cities

Relative city size is based on census information from the United States and Canadian governments.

Bathymetry

The underwater depth of the Great Lakes is meters below sea level.

Land cover

- Water - any area occupied by a body of water.
- Wetland - an ecosystem that is flooded by water, either permanently (for years or decades) or seasonally (for weeks or months).
- Urban - locations covered primarily by manmade materials.
- Cropland - areas used for the production of crops for harvest.
- Broadleaf deciduous forest - vegetation composed primarily of broad-leaved trees that shed all their leaves during one season.
- Mixed forest - a vegetational transition between a needleleaf forest and broadleaf deciduous forest.
- Needleleaf forest - populated with trees that are commonly evergreen and have leaves that are needles.
- Shrubland - plant community characterized by vegetation dominated by shrubs, often also including grasses and herbs.
- Grassland - areas where the vegetation is dominated by grasses.
- Barrenland - an area of land where plant growth may be sparse, stunted, and/or contain limited biodiversity. Environmental conditions such as toxic or infertile soil, high winds, coastal salt-spray, and climatic conditions are often key factors in poor plant growth and development.

Water flow

The greater the width of the arrow, the greater the force behind the flow of water and the greater the land area drained.

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The Great Lakes

The Great Lakes are a chain of five large, interconnected bodies of water. These five lakes, together with the St. Lawrence River, contain 20% of the world's fresh water and form the largest surface freshwater system in the world. The Great Lakes are called Nayaano-nibiimaang Gichigamiin in the Ojibwe language.

Stats:

- Surface area: 82,414 square kms
- Watershed's surface: 1,000 square kms
- Retention time: 6 years
- Watershed population: 120,000 inhabitants
- The Great Lakes basin is home to approx. 40 million people, nestled among 2 countries, 2 provinces, 8 states, and 150+ First Nations

The importance of the Great Lakes watershed

The Great Lakes watershed, or Great Lakes basin, is defined by watersheds that drain into the Great Lakes. A watershed is an area of land where all of the water that falls on it drains into the same outlet — for example, a stream, river, or lake. For this reason, a watershed is also called a drainage basin or catchment. A watershed is made up of surface water (from lakes, streams, wetlands, and reservoirs) and all underlying groundwater. As water continues to move downward, streams and rivers may join with larger lakes and, eventually, the ocean.

A brief history of the Great Lakes

The Great Lakes were formed nearly 20,000 years ago. At the end of the last Ice Age, Canada, as well as the northern part of the United States, was completely covered in ice. As Earth's climate warmed, the lakes were sculpted by a glacial continental ice sheet — a large, slow-moving mass of ice and compact snow. Its movement was so powerful that it scraped the surface of the Earth and created the lake basins.

Gradually, the glacier continued its retreat. The land it had previously weighed down began to rebound and warp upward. Large chunks of left-behind ice pushed down the soil with their immense weight and melted to create lakes. These forces, combined together, gave the Great Lakes the shape we know them by today.

During this very long process, at least as far back as 15,000 BCE, humans had already migrated to areas within the Great Lakes Basin. Contrary to popular belief, the history of human habitation goes back to at least the close of the last Ice Age.

Did You Know?

The Great Lakes watershed has a volume of 6.5 quadrillion gallons of water. That is enough to blanket North America with 1.5 meters of water!

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In spite of their large size, the Great Lakes are extremely vulnerable. Each year, only about 1% of the water in the lakes leaves the basin via the St. Lawrence River. Because water exits the system so slowly, the Great Lakes are essentially a closed system. Until European settlement, the Great Lakes ecosystem was also considered “ecologically naïve,” meaning that historically, its vulnerable animal and plant species were isolated. Now, they are left uniquely exposed to stressors such as pollution, invasive species, and habitat degradation.

Past and present neglect of the system — unsustainable use, discharging of harmful chemicals, and climate change — have led to serious consequences for native species and the health of the Great Lakes. The four biggest, ongoing issues facing the Great Lakes are habitat destruction, sewage pollution, river damming and diversion, and land-use runoff.

The Great Lakes have provided us with invaluable resources — drinking water, food, energy, transportation, recreation, and prosperity. It is paramount that we protect this remarkable and vitally important system that we depend on so critically. The first step is to understand and strengthen our connection to the water. So start your journey, as so many others have, by appreciating the natural, breathtaking beauty of the Great Lakes and their importance to all living things.