

Preamble and Proposition

Coastal and nearshore zones are transitional areas where land, water, and people meet. These areas provide disproportionate ecosystem services supporting human populations, economies, and qualities of life. Many characteristics of the Great Lakes freshwater coast are similar to U.S. marine coasts, in terms of: (1) extensive shoreline; (2) ecological complexity and species richness; (3) large-scale processes that drive the system (e.g., nutrient exchange, energy transfer, and sediment movement); (4) connection with a majority of regional human populations and their qualities of life; (5) generating a world-class economy; and (6) being subject to coastal hazards and multiple stressors.

Following long-term decline in manufacturing and recent national recession, the Great Lakes coastal economy is facing a critical opportunity for re-invention – a re-invention that combines the energy and finances of a resurging coastal economy with today’s environmental ethic. It also provides an opportunity for encouraging and achieving conservation practices for coastal landscapes and their constituent species’ habitats. The national significance of Great Lakes coastal resources has been recognized through such investments as the annual congressional appropriations to Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which provides up to \$300M annually to on-the-ground restoration, enhancement, and protection programs. International and regional significance is also highlighted in the 2012 binational [Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement](#) that calls for increased and explicit emphasis on sustainable management of coastal and nearshore areas.

Wise and sustainable management (i.e., “conservation”) of coastal ecosystems and associated resources will require a diverse assemblage of, and collaboration among, federal, state, tribal, nongovernmental, and private interests. Bringing together that diverse assemblage was the intent of Great Lakes Coastal Conservation Working Group (CCWG) a cross-organizational team initiated in 2013 by the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC). With this charter the CCWG is evolving into an independent, collaborative group outside of the LCC structure: the Great Lakes Coastal Assembly. This new group will continue, and expand upon, coastal conservation efforts started under the LCC.

Identity Statement

The Great Lakes Coastal Assembly (Assembly) envisions coastal landscapes that support the unique structure and processes essential for sustaining healthy species populations, resilient natural communities, and for providing benefits to human society. To achieve this end, the Assembly will work collaboratively with governments, industries, indigenous communities, and non-governmental organizations to align actions around coastal priorities, develop and pursue goals guided by stakeholder desires, and use the best available science to inform coastal conservation strategies.

Purpose of the Great Lakes Coastal Assembly

The purpose of the Assembly is to 1) promote collaborations aimed at management, restoration, and conservation of coastal areas, 2) assist organizations in assessing where investments should be made and aligning investments with regional, state, and local goals, and 3) identify needs for science and decision support and enable actions that help coastal managers make effective decisions. Our efforts will be focused on achieving the priorities below. Specifically, the Assembly will strive to:

- **Catalyze Collaboration:** by coordinating a binational and diverse team of coastal professionals working across the Great Lakes in the United States and Canada and convene topic-based workgroups as needed;
- **Serve as a Resource:** by providing input and expertise that helps further coastal conservation across the Great Lakes and supports the goals of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, or other initiatives;
- **Facilitate Communication and Learning:** by developing and promoting opportunities for the community of Great Lakes coastal professionals to learn and share with one another;
- **Promote Science & Tool Development:** by working with key partners to identify and develop coastal science and decision support and tracking tools that coastal professionals will utilize to prioritize needs/actions, make decisions, and track progress; and
- **Promote a Systems Approach:** by aligning entities to strategically deliver individual coastal protection and restoration actions that collectively benefit the broader Great Lakes coastal landscape and help achieve our shared vision and goals.

Structure and Governance

The Assembly is a non-regulatory, voluntary partnership working through cooperative relationships (interactions) among different agents. The Assembly is comprised of coastal and natural resource driven organizations throughout the Great Lakes region. The Assembly supports and does not diminish the authorities and responsibilities of partners or member agencies. It is anticipated that each partner will engage in the objectives and tasks that are important to them and that align with their mission, strategies, and resources.

Organizational Structure & Process

| Co-Chairs | Coordinator | Membership | Workgroups |
|--|---|--|---|
| 2 co-chairs Elected by membership Serve 2-year staggered terms | Sponsored by member organization(s) | U.S. Federal Government Agencies Environment & Climate Change Canada State and Provincial Governments Native American Tribes and First Nations Local Governments Non-Governmental Organizations Academia Agents Industry Representatives Each organization may have 2 representatives | Established by the membership for priority focus areas Each workgroup will have 2 leads to coordinate the group’s efforts Membership open to anyone interested |

- 1) Assembly membership is voluntary and the group will be led by two co-chairs as elected by the membership.
 - a) Organization representatives are expected to serve for at least 2 years.
 - b) Co-chairs will serve a staggered term, for a total term length of 2 years.
 - c) Membership will be reviewed at least annually and co-chairs will invite new members to join as needed.
- 2) Co-chairs will convene teleconference or video calls when necessary for pertinent updates and business that needs input from the group (~monthly). The call schedule is at the discretion of the co-chairs.
- 3) The Assembly will seek to meet face-to-face at least once per year.
- 4) Workgroups or Ad-hoc Workgroups (e.g., expert panels, technical teams, and engagement teams) composed of Assembly members, or other individuals with relevant expertise, can be established to carry-out specific tasks.

Roles and Responsibilities

Outlined below are the roles and responsibilities of the Co-Chairs, Coordinator, Members, Workgroups, and Ad-hoc Workgroups.

Co-Chairs:

- Implement the Assembly Charter and facilitate updates, as necessary.
- Develop Assembly action plan (work plan) with membership input and support.
- Act as liaisons to other staff and leadership in their respective organizations; to promote collaboration and share documented results and accomplishments.
- Provide direction, support and guidance to the coordinator; assist the coordinator in planning meetings, workshop presentations, and special events as needed.
- Seek funding sources to carry out goals of the Assembly, including support for the coordinator.
- Advocate for continued collaboration among all groups and promote the Assembly at local, regional, national and international meetings.
- Attend regular meetings to share information and identify opportunities for collaborative members.
- Coordinate with the GLRI Focus Area 4 Coastal Systems Workgroup to facilitate annual state requests.
- Facilitate membership consensus for significant decision items.
- Carry out coordinator responsibilities below in the absence of a full-time coordinator as able.

Coordinator:

- Coordinate and facilitate monthly Assembly meetings.
- Follow up with members and Work Group Leads between meetings to ensure action items are completed timely.
- Organize annual Assembly meeting, workshops, and/or special events.
- Foster collaboration among members by seeking their input and assisting them with requests.
- Recruit and track membership striving for representation from all identified organizations. Provide orientation for new members.
- Facilitate and prepare report on Assembly accomplishments.
- Identify funding sources to carry out Assembly goals.
- Facilitate discussions of Assembly members to help identify, prioritize and implement projects in the Assembly's Action Plan (work plan).
- Provide regular news and updates including events and funding opportunities to collaborative members via email, e-newsletters, etc.
- Present/share collaborative information at local, regional, and national meetings.

Members:

- Serve as the representative (point of contact) for your organization.
 - Share Assembly efforts within your organization at all levels as appropriate.
 - Serve as point of contact for given requests (i.e. state proposals for GLRI FA4).
- Actively participate and contribute to the Assembly
 - Attend monthly calls and annual meeting.
 - Contribute toward setting shared vision, goals and priorities for coastal systems.
 - Share agenda topics and presentations ideas.
 - Identify opportunities to partner on projects and funding.
 - Seek input from the group on coastal conservation issues.
 - Share lessons learned and results of initiatives or projects with Assembly members.
- Participate on Assembly workgroup(s) as able.
- Encourage connection and collaboration with other members on areas of interest informally.

Workgroups:

- Implement on-going Assembly initiatives and priorities.
- Designated lead(s) serve as the point of contact for the workgroup and are responsible for coordinating workgroup efforts, such as meetings, decisions, progress, and reporting to the Assembly. At least one of the leads shall be a member of the Assembly. Leads will strive to hold meetings when workgroup members are available. Leads will be designated at the time of workgroup formation by those volunteers who agree to take on the responsibilities, no formal election will occur unless more than two members volunteer.
- Establish a basic purpose, including specific goals, objectives, actions for implementation and workplan.
- Make preliminary decisions and recommendations related to workgroup focus and share with the Assembly members for comments or questions prior to finalizing.

- Workgroup membership is voluntary and open to all members of the Assembly, as well as others who have an interest and expertise in the workgroup efforts.

Ad-Hoc Workgroups:

- Self-organized and formed to implement specific initiatives or projects that meet the goals of the Assembly, as needed. Typically developed to address short term projects or issues.
- Share project progress and lessons learned with the Assembly membership.

Decision Making

- The Assembly will make *significant decisions* by consensus of the membership for both Assembly and Workgroup items. Examples of significant decision items include: establishing coastal goals, priorities and metrics, action or work planning, Assembly sponsored events, and efforts that reflect the GLCA's work such as websites or publications. Co-chairs and workgroup leads will determine what decision items are significant, if there is question input will be sought by membership.
- All members agree to work toward consensus and not simply block a decision they disagree with. In striving for consensus, members will listen actively and suggest options s/he believes can meet all perspectives.
- Co-chairs and workgroup leads will keep Assembly members informed of their efforts and share recommendations for significant decision items at monthly meetings for members input.
- Co-chairs and workgroup leads will provide a summary of their decision recommendations to Assembly members via email prior to the monthly meetings allowing adequate review time. General updates to the Assembly don't require information be shared in advance.
- Assembly members will have the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on significant decision items prior to the co-chairs or workgroup leads finalizing a decision. Members can provide their comments in advance to the co-chairs or during the monthly meeting when the item is being discussed.
- Co-chairs will ask the members if they support or oppose significant decision recommendations at Assembly monthly meetings. If membership consensus is in support, the decision will be finalized.
- It is anticipated Assembly members will support most decisions brought before them, however, if consensus is not achieved after allowing reasonable time for discussions, members will follow the process below to move toward consensus:
 - Determine whether all available facts or information have been shared, and if not, get the information and review it together.
 - Clarify the areas of agreement and disagreement.
 - Those who do not consent have the responsibility to suggest alternatives that meet the needs of all parties and incorporate the differing perspectives.
 - Assembly members should remain at the table during deliberations to hear the full discussions to make informed judgments when decision-making occurs. If a member can not be present at a meeting, they can provide input to the co-chairs in advance and agree to review meeting notes to stay informed of discussions.

- If consensus cannot be attained after following this process, the co-chairs and workgroup leads will determine the following: (a) if a supermajority (80% of members) by the membership is adequate to confirm the decision; or (b) table the decision with suggestions on ways to make future progress toward consensus; and (c) report back to the members on decision status and rationale.
- Each member organization retains the authority to make decisions as an independent agency and entity as appropriate and can request to refrain from an Assembly decision item if they choose.

Assembly Norms

- We welcome and encourage **participation** from all partners and will actively seek out their input related to ongoing work.
- We will **educate** new partners that join so that they become fully aware of past, present, and future work, and can effectively integrate into the Assembly.
- We will **communicate the actions** and activities of this group to other people in our organizations to maximize visibility and participation in the Assembly.
- We will **strive for consensus** around decisions, but recognize that may not always be possible, and thus will work towards decisions that all partners *can live with*.
- We will **take action collectively** on agreed-upon decisions to achieve desired outcomes.
- We will **promote transparency** via open, participatory discussions and accessibility of information via decision support and information delivery tools, or other appropriate platforms.
- We **recognize the independence** of participants, respect the autonomy and distinct missions of the organizations they represent, and therefore encourage dissenting opinions, alternate perspectives, creative approaches, and independent thought.
- We will **use the best available** science to improve decision support, recognizing coastal features are unique geographically (e.g., diverse hydrology, soils, landscape cover types) and conservation approaches must reflect these differences.
- We will **identify information gaps** and management assumptions to evaluate, ultimately increasing conservation efficacy.
- We will **avoid duplicating existing work** by coalescing and recognizing ongoing science, design, and planning efforts, and will instead strive to develop connections between and among these efforts.
- We will **stress iterative learning** so that the Assembly is a constantly improving, learning group.
- We will **remain flexible** in the processes deployed to achieve our ultimate goals.
- We will **be active and persistent** in our application of these principles to ensure a vigorous and vibrant community dedicated to coastal conservation in the Great Lakes basin.