BASELINE COASTAL HABITAT SURVEY
for the Canadian Great Lakes

WEBINAR SERIES

April 19 - 20 and 26 - 27, 2023
Register **HERE** for the free online event!

Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada recently completed a Canadian Great Lakes baseline coastal habitat survey.

For the first time, a standardized method has been developed to assemble, catalogue, classify, map, and survey existing coastal habitats along the Canadian Great Lakes including wetlands, shorelines and uplands, tributaries, inland lakes and ponds, and the broader coastal landscape.

This foundational data can be used to measure, track, and report on coastal ecosystem changes over time and help advance conservation planning.

WHAT YOU'LL TAKE AWAY

- Understanding of the baseline coastal habitat survey and how it was conducted
- How to access the geospatial open data and how it can be used and applied
- Discuss priorities for habitat restoration and protection with climate change considerations
- Engage with a network of Great Lakes conservation practitioners

Questions? Contact
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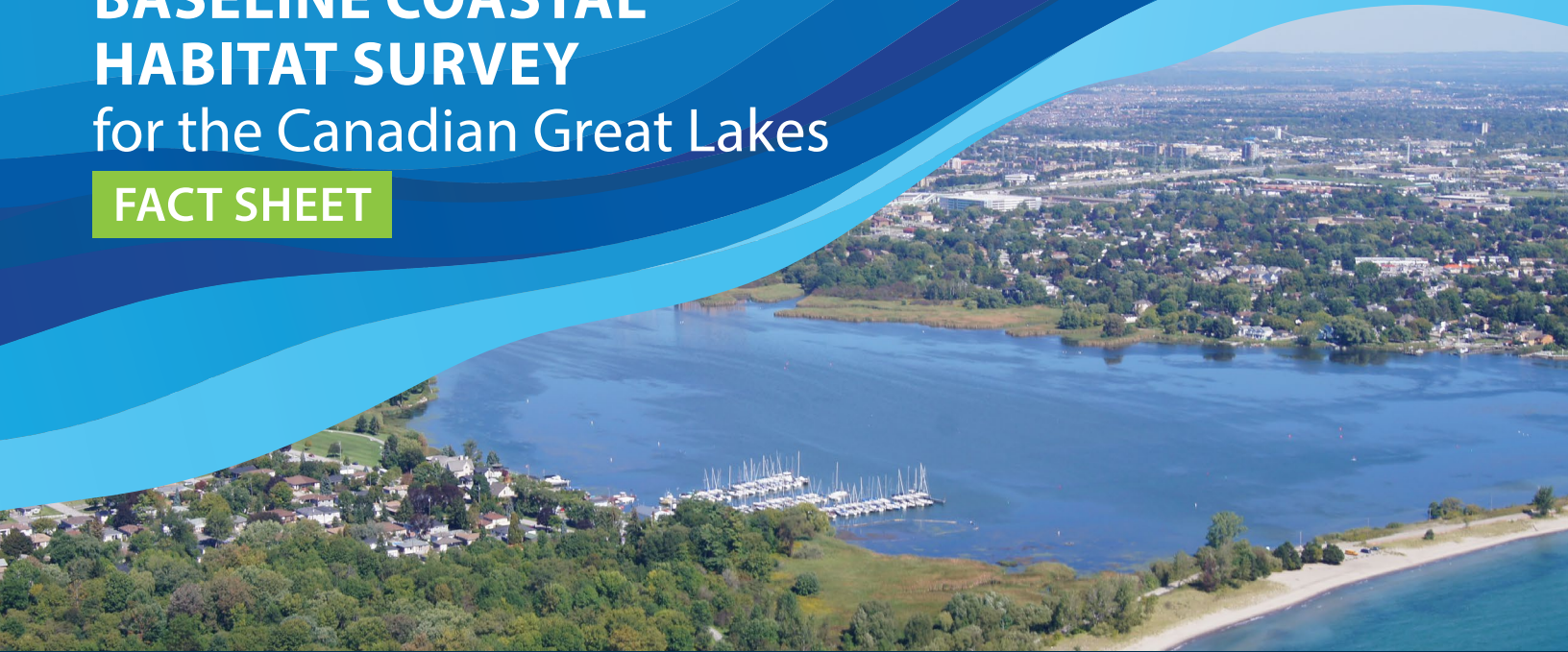Environment and Climate Change Canada

Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Ontario

Toronto and Region **Conservation** Authority

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### FACT SHEET

WHY A BASELINE COASTAL HABITAT SURVEY?

The Great Lakes region is one of the most ecologically diverse regions in North America and is home to 3,500 species of plants and animals. Despite significant and ongoing conservation efforts, threats such as the exploitation of natural resources, land conversion, shoreline development, pollution, invasive species, and altered water flows have resulted in significant loss and degradation of habitats and native species. Climate change, including record high and low water levels, further intensifies existing stressors and results in even greater ecosystem impacts.

Protecting, restoring, and enhancing Great Lakes coastal habitats and species is important for the people, communities, and economies that depend on them. But do we know how much habitat exists on the coastal landscape today? What state are they currently in? Are agencies and organizations achieving the goal of net habitat gain?

Until recently, there was no standardized approach to assemble, classify, and map Great Lakes coastal habitats and efforts to conserve them. To fill this information need, Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada jointly produced a baseline coastal habitat survey for the Canadian Great Lakes.
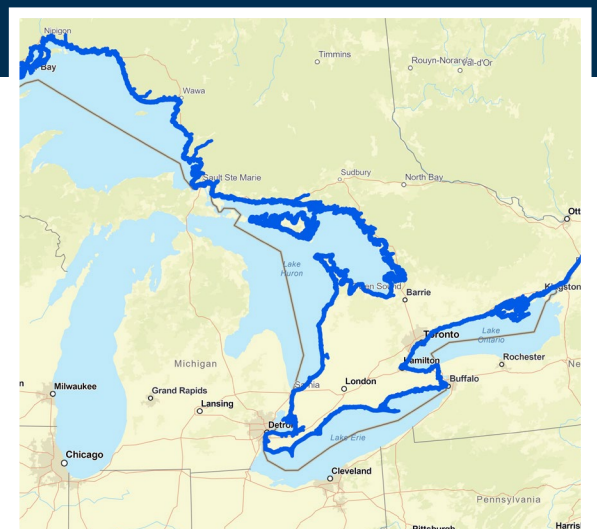
Environment and Climate Change Canada

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WHAT DOES THE SURVEY CONSIST OF?

This survey captured over one million hectares of the Canadian Great Lakes coastal ecosystem. The study area stretches from western Lake Superior to the St. Lawrence River at the Quebec border and extends 2 km inland. That is equivalent to roughly 2.5 million soccer fields!

The survey focused on four habitat categories that are at the core of Great Lakes biodiversity, conservation, water quality, and ecosystem health:

- Wetlands (coastal and inland)
- Shorelines and uplands
- Tributaries
- Inland lakes and ponds

The survey assessed existing habitat extent, distribution, and diversity along the Canadian coastal margin of the Great Lakes. It has also captured a variety of current conditions, functions, stressors, protection, and restoration within the survey area.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

This survey provides the foundational data needed to measure progress in achieving net habitat gain. As defined in technical reports for each lake (coming soon), net habitat gain is an increase, improvement, or enhancement of one or more of the following components:

- Total extent of habitat
- Biological diversity
- Ecological condition
- Ecological function
- Land and water protection
- Restored habitat

The true success of this survey involves putting the best available information into the hands of conservation practitioners, such as land managers, scientists, stewardship groups, Indigenous groups and communities, municipalities, conservation authorities, and funding programs. Application at a regional, local, or place-based scale can enhance habitat and species resilience. To this end, the Project Team has:

- Made the geospatial data openly available online
- Developed technical reports to describe the standardized and repeatable survey methodology and to synthesize results for each lake (in progress), and
- Prepared a family of user-friendly maps and tabular information.

Additionally, in partnership with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Project Team is hosting an information-sharing webinar series (April 19-20 and April 26-27). The Team will present the methods and results of the survey and explore how that data can be used to support conservation planning and the evaluation of conservation success.

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For questions, please contact **Anders.Holder@ec.gc.ca**