

**Record: 1**

**Title:** Great Lakes.  
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**Source:** Let's Take a Look at Geographic Treasures; 2008, p1-1, 1p  
**Document Type:** Article  
**Subject Terms:** GLACIAL lakes  
**Geographic Terms:** GREAT Lakes  
ERIE, Lake  
HURON, Lake (Mich. & Ont.)  
MICHIGAN, Lake  
ONTARIO, Lake (N.Y. & Ont.)  
SUPERIOR, Lake

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the Great Lakes, which are Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, Lake Erie, and Lake Ontario. Glaciers formed the lakes approximately 20,000 years ago. Lake Michigan is the only lake completely within the United States. Parts of the other lakes lie within Canada. Pollution is a problem in all five lakes. The lakes play an important role in the US economy.

**Lexile:** 880  
**Full Text Word Count:** 936  
**ISBN:** 1-4298-1114-5  
**Accession Number:** 14304096  
**Database:** Middle Search Plus

### Great Lakes

The Great Lakes are made up of Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, Lake Erie, and Lake Ontario.

The group measures more than 750 miles from east to west. Portions of the Great Lakes are located in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and the Canadian province of Ontario.

The lakes are the largest fresh water system in the world. They account for approximately 18 percent of the world's fresh water supply.

#### [The Lake System](#)

The Great Lakes cover more than 94,000 square miles. Together, the five massive lakes provide drinking water for 40 million people in the United States and Canada.

In addition to the five interconnecting lakes, the Great Lakes system also includes Lake St. Clair. Lake St. Clair is a small lake located between Lake Erie and Lake Huron.

There are also four channels that connect the Great Lakes. These are St. Marys River, St. Clair River, Detroit River, and Niagara River.

St. Marys River flows for 60 miles from Lake Superior to Lake Huron.

Connecting Lake Huron to Lake Erie are the St. Clair River and the Detroit River. Together, these two rivers flow for 89 miles between the two lakes.

The Niagara River flows from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario.

### History

The Great Lakes were formed approximately 20,000 years ago by glacial movement. The warming of the earth's climate caused the last glacial continental ice sheet to move.

The glacier was so big and heavy that it cut out huge holes in the earth's surface. When the glacier melted, the water filled the holes to create the Great Lakes.

The water levels reached their current levels roughly 4,000 years ago.

Recently, the water levels of the Great Lakes have been declining. This is due to greater evaporation caused by warmer than normal temperatures. Milder winters and lower than average snowfall have also contributed to the lakes' declining water levels.

### Lake Superior

Lake Superior is the largest of the Great Lakes. It is the second largest lake in the world.

It stretches 350 miles from east to west, and 160 miles from north to south.

Lake Superior is by far the deepest of the Great Lakes. It measures 1,332 feet at its deepest point.

In 1985 the first submersible vessel was sent down to the deepest section of Lake Superior.

The lake is bordered by nearly 3,000 miles of rocky shoreline. Its surrounding area is heavily forested.

Lake Superior is the coldest of the Great Lakes. The area supports very little agriculture due to its unfavorable soil and climate conditions.

### Lake Huron

Lake Huron is the second largest of the Great Lakes. It is the fourth largest lake in the world.

It measures 206 miles from east to west, and 183 miles from north to south.

Lake Huron averages 195 feet in depth. It plunges to a depth of 750 feet at its deepest spot.

Sandy beaches surround its 3,827-mile rocky shoreline.

Lake Huron and Lake Michigan are joined together by the Straits of Mackinac.

The Mackinac Bridge stretches across the straits. It connects the state of Michigan's upper and lower peninsulas. Dr. David B. Steinman designed the bridge. It is 552 feet tall and 5 miles long. It is the longest suspension bridge in the world.

### Lake Michigan

Lake Michigan is the third largest of the Great Lakes. It is the fifth largest lake in the world.

The lake measures 118 miles from east to west, and 307 miles from north to south.

Lake Michigan has an average depth of 279 feet. It measures 925 feet at its deepest location.

1,600 miles of shoreline surround the lake. It contains the largest freshwater sand dunes in the world.

It is the only Great Lake located completely within the borders of the United States.

The temperatures on the lake differ across its area. The northern sections of the lake are cold. The southern sections of the lake are warmer.

### Lake Erie

Lake Erie is the fourth largest of the Great Lakes. It is the 13th largest lake in the world.

It stretches 241 miles from east to west, and 57 miles from north to south.

Lake Erie averages 62 feet in depth. Its deepest point is 210 feet.

871 miles of shoreline surround the lake.

Because of its shallow depths, Lake Erie tends to warm quicker than the other Great Lakes during the summer. It also freezes earlier in the winter.

Its soils are the most fertile of all the Great Lakes.

### Lake Ontario

Lake Ontario is the smallest of the Great Lakes. It is the 17th largest lake in the world.

It stretches 193 miles from east to west, and 53 miles from north to south.

Lake Ontario averages 283 feet in depth. It measures 802 feet at its deepest location.

It has 871 miles of shoreline, which consists mostly of wetlands that are not extensively farmed.

### Environmental and Economic Impact

No matter their size, each of the five Great Lakes has been the victim of pollution. This strains the lakes' ecosystems.

City waste, farm chemicals, and industrial waste all contribute to the pollution of the water.

To make matters worse, the Great Lakes experience little outflow of water each year. This allows pollutants to remain in the lakes.

The Great Lakes are vital to the United States economy. Agriculture plays an important role, and hay, corn, cherries and soybeans are the primary crops in the area.

The Great Lakes are also a major shipping channel. More than 200 million tons of cargo is shipped through the lakes annually.

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By Joy Case

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