



Ensuring the waters of the Great Lakes Basin are healthy, public, and protected for all

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Protecting Michigan's "Sixth Great Lake" Webinar to present new report from University of Michigan's School for Environment and Sustainability

Traverse City, Mich. — A new report by graduate students at the University of Michigan's School for Environment and Sustainability (SEAS) highlights the urgent need for Michigan to adopt a comprehensive strategy to protect its groundwater—an often overlooked but essential resource that underpins the state's drinking water, economy, and environment. Titled "*A Groundwater Strategy for Michigan: Protecting the 'Sixth Great Lake'*", the report presents a roadmap for safeguarding groundwater through coordinated legislation, regulation, and advocacy recommendations. **On April 8 at 12 pm, the SEAS graduate students and Flow Water Advocates will host a live, virtual webinar discussing key recommendations to protect Michigan's most valuable resource.**

Globally, groundwater makes up 96% of available freshwater. In Michigan, that resource is vast—estimated to hold a volume roughly equal to Lake Huron—and critical to daily life. Approximately 45% of Michigan residents rely on groundwater for drinking water, while nearly 80% of agricultural irrigation and 75% of commercial water use depend on it. Despite Michigan being surrounded by the largest freshwater system on Earth, the Great Lakes Basin,

groundwater remains underrecognized and insufficiently managed.

“Michigan is uniquely defined by water, but our groundwater, the ‘Sixth Great Lake’, has been largely invisible in policy and planning,” said Liz Kirkwood. “This report makes clear that protecting groundwater is not optional—it’s essential to our long-term health, economy, and environmental resilience.”

The report assesses Michigan’s current groundwater management framework through extensive policy analysis, interviews, and case studies. Researchers found that Michigan lacks a dedicated groundwater protection statute and instead relies on a patchwork of federal, state, regional, and local policies. This structure has led to siloed decision-making, inconsistent communication, and gaps in critical areas, such as groundwater mapping, data management, and region-specific oversight.

Key recommendations:

- The Groundwater Protection Act: A package of 12 bills that would amend state law, create new fees for polluters, create a statewide septic code, create a new interagency council, add new monitoring wells to the state’s network, and propose an environmental bond to fund mapping and local grants.
- Changes to the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy to revise their withdrawal permitting tool, add to data-sharing platforms, expand mining regulation, and create a new public education initiative.
- Proposals for advocacy organizations to support new legislation, conduct research, and lead public education.

The webinar is free to attend, and will include audience Q&A. Registration is available online at www.FlowWaterAdvocates.org/SEAS.

The full report will be available at FlowWaterAdvocates.org/SEAS on April 6, 2026.

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Flow Water Advocates is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Traverse City, Michigan. Our mission is to ensure the waters of the Great Lakes Basin are healthy, public, and protected for all. With a staff of legal and policy experts, communicators, and community builders, Flow is a trusted resource for Great Lakes advocates. We help communities, businesses, agencies, and governments make informed policy decisions and protect public trust rights to water. Learn more at www.FlowWaterAdvocates.org.

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