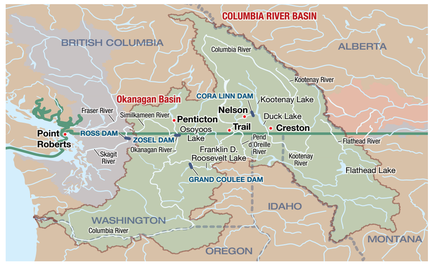
IJC Activities

1. Alaska-Yukon basin

Alaska, Yukon and BC panhandle

The Boundary Waters Treaty covers the fresh waters along the international boundary between Alaska and Yukon and British Columbia. There are currently no References or Orders in this region, nor have there been any in the past, but any issues that may arise related to the fresh waters in the region could be referred to the IJC.



2. Columbia River basin

Osoyoos Lake

Zosel Dam, which regulates the level of Osoyoos Lake, was constructed in 1987, replacing an earlier dam. The International Osoyoos Lake Board of Control supervises its operation to ensure compliance with conditions in the IJC's 1982 order of approval, amended in 1985 and 2013.

Boundary Waters Treaty, Article IV

Kootenay Lake

In 1938, the IJC approved construction and operation of the Cora Linn Dam with conditions related to Kootenay Lake levels and outflows. There are also a number of orders pertaining to dikes along the Kootenay River upstream from the lake, as these can affect water levels at the boundary. The International Kootenay Lake Board of Control supervises the operation of the dam and ensures that conditions set for Kootenay Lake are maintained.

Boundary Waters Treaty, Article IV

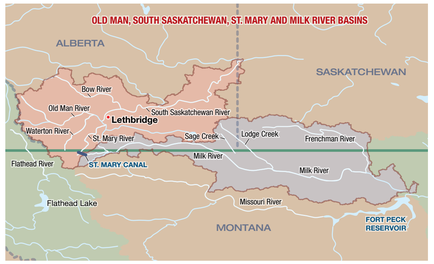
Columbia River

In 1941, the IJC issued an order of approval to raise water levels at the boundary behind the Grand Coulee Dam. The International Columbia River Board of Control monitors and reports annually on the effects of the operation of the dam and its reservoir, Franklin D. Roosevelt Lake, on water levels and flows at the boundary.

Boundary Waters Treaty, Article IV

Differences arising under the 1961 Columbia River Treaty, which Canada and the United States cannot resolve, may be referred by either party to the IJC for decision.

Columbia River Treaty

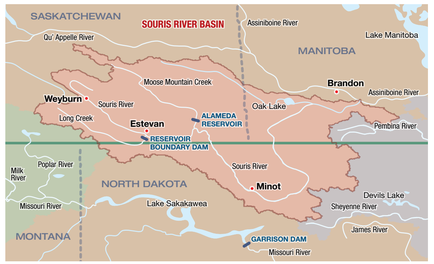


3. Old Man River basin and Milk River basin

St. Mary and Milk rivers

The Boundary Waters Treaty provides for apportionment of the waters of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers between Canada and the United States. The measurement and apportionment of the water, in accordance with article VI of the Treaty and a 1921 IJC order, is carried out jointly by Accredited Officers appointed by governments and acting under the direction of the IJC.

Boundary Waters Treaty, Article VI

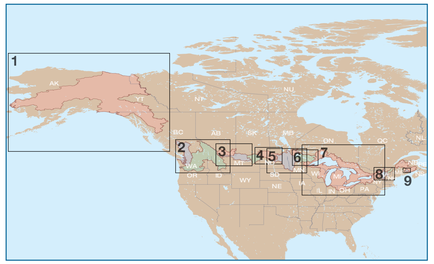


4. Souris River basin

Souris River

The International Souris River Board monitors the apportionment of waters of the Souris River at its two international boundary crossings consistent with 1989 Canada-United States Agreement for Water Supply and Flood Control in the Souris River Basin. The Board also helps implement and review the Joint Water Quality Monitoring Program pursuant to this agreement. In addition, the Board keeps the IJC informed of water use and water-related development activities in the basin.

Agreement for Water Supply and Flood Control in the Souris River Basin; Boundary Waters Treaty, Article IX



5. Red River basin

Red River

The International Red River Board provides continual surveillance of water quality of the Red River at the International Boundary.
It keeps the IJC informed of basin activities that affect transboundary river flows, water quality, and ecosystem health of the Red River and its transboundary tributaries. In addition, the Board monitors the implementation of flood-related recommendations made by the IJC in its report on the flood of 1997, and has undertaken a number of projects to build local capacity for addressing issues within the watershed.

Boundary Waters Treaty, Article IX

Shoal Lake

In 1913 the IJC approved the diversion and use of water for domestic and sanitary purposes from ShoalLake for the city of Winnipeg. The aqueduct is still in operation and the IJC retains jurisdiction over the order.

6. Lake of the Woods basin

Rainy-Lake of the Woods

From 1949 to 2013, the IJC supervised water levels and flows to avoid the occurrence of emergency conditions on the Rainy and Namakan chain of lakes, through the International Rainy Lake Board of Control. Between 1966 and 2013 the International Rainy River Water Pollution Board maintained continuing surveillance of the water quality of the Rainy River.

In 2013 the IJC established the International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Board which subsumed the responsibilities of both existing boards. The Board is mandated to monitor and report on the ecological health of the Lake of the Woods and Rainy Lake boundary waters aquatic ecosystem, including water quality. The Board has two advisory bodies – one made up of industry representatives and the other populated by community members. Water regulation operations rest with the Board's Water Levels Committee.

Boundary Waters Treaty, Article IX, and Rainy Lake Convention

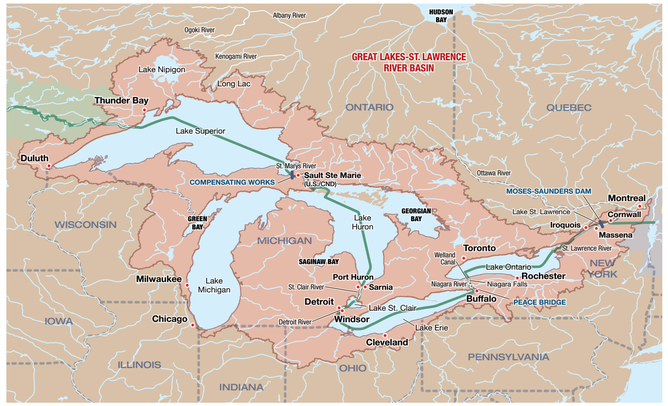
Since 1925, the International Lake of the Woods Control Board has approved the rate of total discharge of water from Lake of the Woods when lake levels rise above or fall below certain extreme elevations. The Canadian Lake of the Woods Board oversees the regulation of water levels and flows on the Lake of the Woods between those extreme low and high conditions.

Lake of the Woods Convention

International Watershed Initiative (IWI)

The International Watersheds Initiative (IWI) fosters watershed-level solutions to challenges that arise when waters are shared by two nations and competing interests. It does so by promoting science, communication, collaboration and coordination among the public, stakeholders and resource managers using an integrated, ecosystem approach.

This approach assists citizens and governments by providing information and facilitating discussions on local concerns such as fish habitat, pollution, and low and high water flows. IWI activities might include undertaking studies related to how operating a dam may affect a fish spawning, or organizing a science forum to discuss issues that water quality in a transboundary watershed. IWI boards carry out their functions in a manner similar to the Commission's other boards, but with greater attention to interrelationships within the ecosystem, and public involvement.



7. Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin

Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement

Under the 1978 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between Canada and the United States, amended in 1983, 1987 and 2012, the IJC monitors the governments' progress in achieving the goals of the agreement, educates the public on the inherent value of the Great Lakes, and provides advice on other matters related to the Agreement. The Great Lakes Water Quality Board assists the International Joint Commission with reviewing and assessing progress under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. The Science Advisory Board provides scientific advice to the International Joint Commission and the Great Lakes Water Quality Board, and is responsible for developing recommendations on all matters related to research and the development of scientific knowledge pertinent to Great Lakes water quality. It has a Research Coordination and Science Priority Committee.

Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, Articles VII and VIII

Lake Superior and the St. Marys River

In 1914, the IJC approved applications to divert water from the St. Marys River for hydroelectric power and to construct compensating works for controlling the level of Lake Superior. The International Lake Superior Board of Control ensures that the outflow from Lake Superior at the Sault complies with conditions established by the IJC. Supplementary orders in 1979 and in 1985 modified the basis for determining outflows and provided for remedial works to protect the St. Marys Rapids fishery, respectively. In 2014, under a new supplementary Order, the Board adopted Regulation Plan 2012.

Boundary Waters Treaty, Article III

Niagara River

The IJC established the International Niagara Board of Control in 1953 to review and approve construction of works controlling flows over Niagara Falls. The Board monitors the operation of the Chippewa-Grass Island Pool control structure above Niagara Falls to meet the requirements of the 1950 Niagara Treaty. Under a 1964 order of approval, the Board also supervises the annual installation and removal of an ice boom at the outlet of Lake Erie.

Niagara River Treaty; Boundary Waters Treaty, Article III

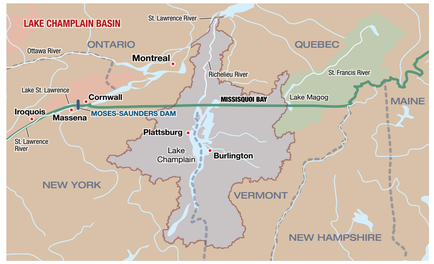
Lake Ontario/St. Lawrence River

In 1952, the IJC approved construction of this hydroelectric power project in the international rapids section of the St. Lawrence River. It established the International St. Lawrence River Board of Control to ensure that project operations comply with the IJC's order of approval. The Board also supervises a small diversion of water upstream of the project from Lake St. Lawrence to improve summer flows in the Raisin River in accordance with an IJC order of approval.

Boundary Waters Treaty, Article III

The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Adaptive Management (GLAM) Committee undertakes the monitoring, modeling and assessment needed to support ongoing evaluation of the regulation of water levels and flows. The GLAM Committee reports to the Lake Superior Board of Control, Niagara River Board of Control and St. Lawrence River Board of Control.

Boundary Waters Treaty, Article III



8. Lake Champlain basin

Richelieu River and Lake Champlain

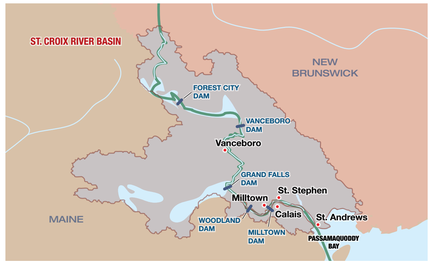
The International Lake Champlain-Richelieu River Technical Working Group is mandated to carry out two tasks related to the 2013 Plan of Study on flooding in the Lake Champlain Richelieu River basin.

The IJC received two references in the 2000s related to phosphorus loads in Missisquoi Bay.

Boundary Waters Treaty, Article IX

Data Harmonization

The Data Harmonization Project began in 2008 when the IJC created a Transboundary Data Harmonization Task Force. Data harmonization means that databases from Canadian and U.S. agencies are integrated and replicated, and agencies are using the same standardized suite of hydrographic interpretations in transboundary basins.



9. St. Croix River basin

St. Croix River

The International St. Croix River Watershed Board works with basin stakeholders to help prevent and resolve environmental disputes. It reports on compliance with water quality objectives, pollution control programs and fish and aquatic wildlife restoration efforts. In addition, the Board ensures that privately owned dams on the St. Croix River at Forest City, Vanceboro, Grand Falls and Milltown are operated consistent with conditions set by IJC orders of approval.

Boundary Waters Treaty, Articles III and IX

The International Joint Commission

Canada and the United States created the International Joint Commission as they recognized that each country is affected by the other's actions in lake and river systems along the border. The two countries cooperate to manage these waters wisely and to protect them for the benefit of today's citizens and future generations.

The IJC is guided by the Boundary Waters Treaty, signed by Canada and the United States in 1909. The treaty provides general principles for preventing and resolving disputes over waters shared between the two countries and for settling other transboundary issues. The specific application of these principles is decided on a case-by-case basis.

The IJC has two main responsibilities: regulating projects that affect water levels and flows across the boundary and investigating transboundary issues and recommending solutions.
The IJC's recommendations and decisions take into account the needs of a wide range of water uses, including sanitation and drinking water, commercial shipping, hydroelectric power generation, agriculture, industry, fishing, recreational boating and shoreline property.

Bassins hydrographiques transfrontaliers entre le Canada et les États-Unis

Cette carte représente les bassins transfrontaliers d'après l'harmonisation préliminaire des données géospatiales pour les bassins hydrographiques infra-régionaux du Canada et des États-Unis. L'image, établie au moyen du système de coordonnées SCRS 1983 nord-américain de la Commission géologique du Canada, présente des superficies en proportions réelles, comme si on les observait de l'espace. Les données d'altimétrie continentale, d'une résolution de un kilomètre cube, et les données hydro-vectorielles et polygonales, à une échelle de 1:1 000 000, ont été superposées sur les couches de base.

Statistiques relatives à la frontière canado-américaine

Longueur totale de la partie terrestre de la frontière :
5 061 kilomètres (3 145 milles)

Longueur totale de la partie aquatique de la frontière :
3 830 kilomètres (2 380 milles)

Longueur totale de la frontière, de l'océan Pacifique à l'océan Atlantique :
- 6 416 kilomètres (2 878 kilomètres sur terre, 3 538 kilomètres sur l'eau)
- 3 987 milles (4 631 milles sur terre, 2 199 milles sur l'eau)

Longueur totale de la frontière, de l'océan Pacifique à l'océan Arctique :
- 2 475 kilomètres (2 183 kilomètres sur terre, 292 kilomètres sur l'eau)
- 1 538 milles (1 357 milles sur terre, 182 milles sur l'eau)