

A Healthier Great Lakes



Over the past 30 years, our Adopt-a-Beach program volunteers have shown the deepest of commitments to keeping litter off beaches and plastic out of our Great Lakes. We are honored by their work, which plays a big part in keeping the Great Lakes clean, healthy and beautiful for all. Reducing harmful impacts on the Great Lakes makes a critical difference in sustaining the nature and clean water we all need to thrive. And our thousands of volunteers start by tackling beach pollution.

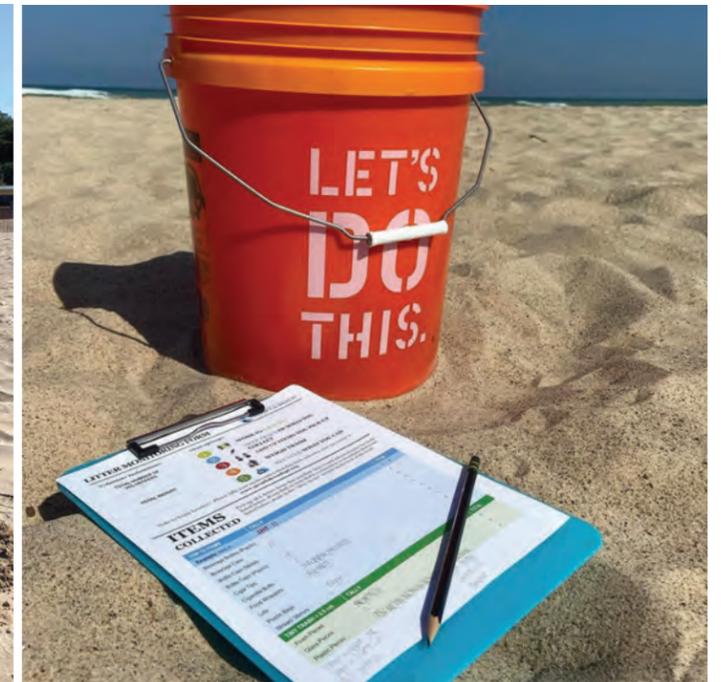
It is heart-warming and hope-inducing to join volunteers year after year, standing shoulder to shoulder with friends, neighbors, and people they may have just met, putting their own hands to work cleaning hundreds of miles of shoreline of the plastic and other debris that pollutes our water. And most importantly, we all learn from each other why clean water and time outdoors are so important to our families, friends, and communities.

We've also learned that removing trash is just one part of the solution. Adopt-a-Beach volunteers are on the front lines, using data to show how pervasive the Great Lakes plastic pollution problem is, but more is needed to solve the problem. We need holistic policy solutions, and we're starting to see changes. For example, multiple bills aimed at reducing plastic pollution were introduced in the U.S. Congress this year. In addition, the Canadian government has banned many single-use plastics, focusing on those most frequently found in the environment and the least recyclable items, with the policy expected to go into effect in late 2021. While not perfect, it is an important start.

The Great Lakes region has been a pollution reduction leader for decades. And that leadership often starts with people experiencing the impacts of pollution and telling their stories. With your help, I'm proud to have our volunteers making a case for a healthier Great Lakes.

As always, thank you for your support and thank you for reading.

Joel Brammeier, President & CEO



Adopt-a-Beach Celebrates 30 Years

For 30 years, thousands of volunteers from all over the Great Lakes and from all walks of life signup and show up for beach cleanups each year. They're part of an impactful movement to ensure that one of the world's largest surface freshwater systems is cleaner, safer, and protected.

Adopt-a-Beach volunteers don't merely pick up thousands of pounds of litter and go home; they also collect important data. At each cleanup event, volunteers painstakingly tally each item they clean up and the information is then entered into our online database that was developed in 2003. This huge data set – the largest of its kind in the Great Lakes region - provides us with invaluable information about the litter on our beaches and in the Great Lakes. The biggest finding is that roughly 85% of the litter picked up during Adopt-a-Beach cleanups is made up fully or partially of plastic.

Adopt-a-Beach volunteers are on the front lines of keeping plastic out of our lakes. Their data collection efforts have raised the alarm about Great Lakes plastic pollution. The data has also been critical to raising awareness about microplastics

in the Great Lakes as the plastic on our beaches, if not cleaned up, breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces of plastic that pollute our drinking water and harm wildlife.

Data from Adopt-a-Beach events has helped to narrow our attention on where we can best work together to reduce the use of plastic before it even reaches our beaches. For instance, food waste – from takeout containers to bottle caps – is among the top items found on Great Lakes beaches. Researchers, elected officials, government agencies, and nonprofit partners have used Adopt-a-Beach data to make the case for private and public efforts, such as programs aimed at reducing single-use plastic items, to keep plastic pollution out of the lakes.

Tackling litter and plastic pollution in the Great Lakes is no small task, but together we were able to make an impact, reaching across all five lakes and all eight Great Lakes states. From our passionate individuals to community partners, they all have made the Alliance's Adopt-a-Beach program what it is today. And, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we don't see any signs of them slowing down.

Thank you to all of our partners, coordinators, and volunteers who have given their time and resources over the past 30 years. We couldn't accomplish all that we've done without your efforts.



1991 | First Adopt-a-Beach events held in September as part of the International Coastal Cleanup. For the first decade-plus, Adopt-a-Beach cleanup events were held in September only.

2003 | Adopt-a-Beach becomes the most extensive volunteer program ever to collect data on Great Lakes beach litter with the launch of year-round cleanups and an online database to ease data collection.



2007 | Adopt-a-Beach volunteers push for and win beach smoking bans along 30 miles of shoreline in Michigan and Chicago.

2012 | Adopt-a-Beach volunteers are among the first responders helping with cleanup after Hurricane Sandy blows in as a destructive superstorm, wreaking havoc on Lake Erie and the Cleveland lakefront

2012 | Scientists begin publishing research on plastic pollution in the Great Lakes using Adopt-a-Beach data and other data sources. One of the early findings: widespread presence of plastic microbeads in the waters of all five Great Lakes, leading to an awareness about microplastics in the Great Lakes.



2018 | A new toolkit - *Plastic-Free Great Lakes: An Advocacy Toolkit to Make a Difference In Your Community* – released to help volunteers take action on plastic pollution.

2018 | A federal ban on plastic microbeads in personal care products takes effect across the U.S.

2020 | An all-new Adopt-a-Beach website launched, making it easier than ever for people to volunteer and track data on their cleanups. And, despite a global pandemic, volunteers kept connecting and cleaning up.



In 2003, the Alliance launched the Adopt-a-Beach online database. Here's a snapshot of data collected by our volunteers showing their impact.

464,923 pounds of litter reported as removed from Great Lakes shorelines by Adopt-a-Beach volunteers  **8,282,807 pieces**

of litter reported as picked up from Great lakes beaches by Adopt-a-Beach

volunteers  **More than 200,000** total attendance at Adopt-a-Beach events

14,791 cleanup events hosted  More than **500,000 volunteer hours** 

Cleanups on all 5 Great Lakes and **in all 8 Great Lakes states**



Voices of our Volunteers

Experiences

I think that the Adopt-a-Beach program allows us to develop a deep place-based connection to our shores while at the same time contributing to a regional/national/international understanding of the challenges that are facing our water systems. – CHICAGO, IL

Something has to be done so that people are aware of the environmental problems going on. Adopt-a-Beach is a program that allows its volunteers to send that message. – CHICAGO, IL

I like the way groups come together to serve a mutual purpose of doing a good deed for the environment. – HIGHLAND PARK, IL

I think Adopt-a-Beach makes a difference, both in action and in awareness. – Caledonia, WI

I like that Adopt-a-Beach offers involvement in helping protect the most precious natural resource: water. – Gary, IN

Our team found the experience rewarding in every way imaginable: cleaning the beach, getting fresh air and sunshine, and truly making a small contribution to making the planet a better place. – Muskegon, MI

In participating in Adopt-a-Beach we can see the extent of our society's penchant for easy disposal, and the far-reaching effects of plastic containers and bags.– MI

We are a group of Great Lakes surfers and friends who enjoy Lake Superior's cold, clean water and pristine shoreline. To us, a clean lake means clean waves! – Duluth, MN

We participate in Adopt-a-Beach to provide opportunities for the public to become active in environmental activities and to have a structured format for cleaning and monitoring the beach. – Mentor, OH

It allows you to get to know a property over time, and really develop a different sense of understanding about a place and how it may be affected by pollution. – Racine, IL

This gives my students a way to give back to the community and the environment. They can see the change they are making. – Chicago, IL

(We like) to be active participants in improving our beach and also in scientific research. – Bay Village, OH



Donor Spotlight: Meijer



Adopt-a-Beach corporate partners are a critical source of financial support for the program, ensuring the Alliance has the resources to support thousands of volunteers around the region. Meijer, a supercenter chain with stores throughout the Midwest and headquarters in Walker, Michigan, has supported the Alliance for three years.

We recently caught up with Erik Petrovskis, Director of Environmental Compliance and Sustainability at Meijer, to learn more about why they support the program.

He shared that Meijer's mission is to enrich lives in the communities they serve. As a Great Lakes-based retailer, they're aligned with the Alliance on protecting our most important resource – fresh, clean Great Lakes water for our communities.

"We were looking for a partner that would help Meijer raise awareness

of Great Lakes issues for our team members and our customers," said Petrovskis. "The reach and track record of the Alliance set the foundation for a productive partnership."

In addition to generous financial support, Meijer staff roll their sleeves up and come out to volunteer at our beach cleanups. "Plastic pollution and Great Lakes stewardship are two of the most important environmental issues for our customers," said Petrovskis.



"We understand that to be a good company, we must be a good neighbor. So, we are proud to team with the Alliance and our customers in cleaning up Great Lakes beaches."

Meijer's commitment to building stronger and healthier communities goes beyond beach cleanups. The company continues to support our efforts to tackle threats to the Great Lakes and ensure that all communities have equitable access to clean, affordable drinking water.

As Meijer continues to lead in implementing green infrastructure at its stores across the region, the Alliance looks forward to future partnership opportunities to raise awareness in the fight against plastic pollution.

IN BRIEF

Did you miss our Lakes Chat Summer Series?

Lakes Chat Summer Series

Grab your mid-day snack and join us LIVE every Tuesday this summer as we dish about topics concerning the Great Lakes.

Each week this summer we hosted live chats with Great Lakes experts on issues ranging from invasive species and plastic pollution to infrastructure and climate change. To watch the conversations, visit the Alliance for the Great Lakes YouTube channel and look for the Lakes Chat playlist.

Davis Receives Prestigious Great Lakes Leadership Award

The Great Lakes Protection Fund named Crystal M.C. Davis, the Alliance's Vice President for Policy and Strategic Engagement, a recipient of a 2021 Great Lakes Leadership Award in recognition of her efforts to protect the health of the Great Lakes basin and the people who live in the region. She is one of six individuals the Fund is recognizing for their trailblazing efforts on behalf of the Great Lakes. To learn more about the award and Davis' work, visit: greatlakes.org/news



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THREE Ways to Support the Great Lakes This Holiday

1

Giving Tuesday, which is Tuesday, November 30, kicks off the holiday charitable giving season. Each year, it follows Black Friday and Cyber Monday with a focus on a global day of giving back. Keep an eye out on our social media, in your email in-box, and on our website. We have a big goal of beating last year's record of \$38,245 donated in support of our work to protect the Great Lakes.

2

Give the Gift of the Lakes.

What do you get for the person who has everything but loves the Great Lakes? Donate to support Great Lakes protection in their honor. We make it easy to make an honorary gift at donate.greatlakes.org. This tax-deductible gift will help the Great Lakes and won't get lost in the back of their closet.

3

Support the Great Lakes in Your End-of-Year Giving. Sometimes it seems like we only hear bad news about the Great Lakes. But our team here at the Alliance for the Great Lakes is focused each day on finding solutions to protect our region's most precious resource. Help protect the Great Lakes today with a year-end gift at donate.greatlakes.org.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

We'd love your feedback about our Watermarks newsletter. We're also happy to answer your questions about pressing Great Lakes issues.

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Photos in this issue by Lloyd Degrane, Oliva Reda,
Nate Drag and Renae dePerio.

The Alliance for the Great Lakes works across the region
to protect our most precious resource: the fresh, clean,
and natural waters of the Great Lakes.

