

# Watermarks

## Next Wave: Youth Engagement in the Great Lakes Region



## Mobilizing New Generations for the Great Lakes



I am inspired by every person who advocates for our Great Lakes. When I listen to their “whys” for getting involved, I often hear a desire to pair traditional conservation and protection with a movement that ensures our waters are a source of life and joy for all. The enthusiasm and innovation of younger generations are particularly uplifting, and we need to listen closely to what they are saying.

This past year, the contributions of the next generations of Great Lakes protectors had a huge impact on the Alliance. Through school collaborations, the recognition of two young talents at the One Earth Film Festival, and philanthropy and advocacy, new voices are highlighting our work and enlightening the Alliance as we consider our priorities.

I’m dedicated to supporting those who come next with the information, tools and support they need to play an organized and influential part in Great Lakes protection. Their enthusiasm and fresh perspectives are what will sustain the Great Lakes movement for years to come. In our latest Watermarks issue, we celebrate youthful energy and the power of multigenerational commitment to the Great Lakes. This is a tribute to young people’s environmental consciousness and desire to do better than those that came before them. Their work spans cleanups, education, media, and advocacy, serving as a beacon of hope for the Great Lakes.

You, I and everyone at the Alliance are creating a history together - a legacy of individual and collective impact bound together by a shared passion for the lakes. I and the Alliance are working hard to welcome new voices to our mission and create hope, action, and dedication to the Great Lakes. Your crucial support is extending our reach, empowering us to listen to those who are next, and ensure the Great Lakes remain a cherished resource for all. Thank you.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joel Brammeier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

**Joel Brammeier CEO, Alliance for the Great Lakes**

# Youth Engagement in the Great Lakes: A Beacon for Environmental Stewardship

The Great Lakes region witnesses the rising involvement of young people in environmental preservation, notably through the Alliance for the Great Lakes' Adopt a Beach program. Olivia Reda, the Volunteer Engagement Manager, shares a glimpse into this vibrant movement, where passion and dedication meet action.

## Youthful Energy

In 2023, youth from elementary through high school participated in 82 cleanup events. Over 2,000 volunteers contributed their time, removing more than 2,500 lbs. of litter from the beaches. These numbers are not just statistics; they represent a growing awareness and commitment among the younger generation to protect the natural wonders of the Great Lakes region.

## Impactful Stories from the Field

The impact of these cleanups extends beyond immediate environmental benefits. They are transformative experiences for the participants, many of whom share stories of surprise, learning, and inspiration. From discovering the pervasive problem of microplastics to undertaking significant efforts to remove large debris, these young volunteers are not only contributing to cleaner beaches but also gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges facing our ecosystems.

## The Role of Education and Engagement

Central to the Alliance's mission is the integration of educational programs



with hands-on environmental work. By providing resources tailored to young learners, the Alliance ensures that the experiences at the beach serve as practical extensions of classroom learning, emphasizing the importance of conservation and the impact of human activity on natural habitats.

## Overcoming Challenges with Youthful Optimism

Despite the daunting nature of environmental challenges, young volunteers exhibit a remarkable capacity for hope and innovation. Their approach to problem-solving and their willingness to engage with complex issues offer fresh perspectives and solutions, underscoring the critical role of youth in the environmental movement.

## Looking to the Future

As the Alliance for the Great Lakes looks ahead, it aims to deepen the connection between young people and the lakes, fostering a sense of



responsibility and stewardship. By empowering youth with knowledge and opportunities for action, the Alliance envisions a future where the Great Lakes are cared for by generations who have grown up understanding their value and the importance of preserving them for the future.

## A Call to Action for Young Environmentalists

The message to young individuals looking to make a difference is clear: every effort counts, and everyone has a role to play in the preservation of our natural resources. Through programs like Adopt a Beach, the Alliance for the Great Lakes offers a platform for youth to engage in meaningful conservation work, laying the groundwork for a lifetime of environmental stewardship.

In reflecting on the involvement of youth in lake conservation, Olivia Reda highlights the importance of their energy and ideas in shaping the future of the Great Lakes. "It's a testament to the power of collective action and the critical role that young people play in safeguarding the environment for generations to come."



# Legacy of the Lakes, Spanning Generations



**As five Solberg siblings gathered with the Alliance for the Great Lakes on a recent tranquil Sunday afternoon, the dialogue mirrored their profound connection with the waters they are dedicated to preserving. This conversation was more than a testament to their steadfast commitment to the Great Lakes; it explored their collective aspirations, the generational impact that has sculpted their environmental ethos, and their philanthropic journey. Central to this are their parents, Joyce and Charlie Solberg, whose lifelong enchantment with Lake Michigan burgeoned into a robust legacy of advocacy for the Great Lakes, paralleling the mission of the Alliance—a cause they have championed for over a decade.**

## A Lifelong Connection

Joyce Solberg's bond with Lake Michigan was kindled in her youth, her days marked by swimming, water skiing, and beachside endeavors in Wilmette, Illinois. This initial connection matured into a deep-seated appreciation for the lake's magnificence and purity—a legacy she and Charlie earnestly nurtured within their children.

## Rooted in Nature

The Solberg siblings were steeped in reverence for the natural world from their earliest memories. Lisa Solberg reflects, "Since we were little, we were immersed in our natural surroundings... we were not allowed inside. We had to play outside. We had to respect the outdoors." This ethos, cultivated by their parents and grandparents, established the foundation for a lifetime of environmental stewardship, guiding them toward their alliance with the Great Lakes. "The way that we grew up...we just have

such a strong pull into family time outdoors. And so, ensuring that the outdoors is there for us to carry on for generations in the future, is very important and is a big pillar in our family life", noted Sarah Ludden.





**“Ensuring that the outdoors is there for us to carry on for generations in the future, is very important and is a big pillar in our family life.”**

### Expanding the Legacy

In a reflective turn, Chad Solberg reveals a nuanced understanding of philanthropy within the Solberg family: “Philanthropy wasn’t ingrained from childhood but learned later in life, particularly through Solberg Manufacturing’s contributions to environmental programs.”

Sarah delves deeper into the family’s approach. She explains, “Everyone in the family is quite humble, so philanthropy wasn’t a topic we often discussed. Like Chad mentioned, it’s only recently that we’ve started to explore how we can make an impact in ways beyond our immediate, hands-on efforts. It’s fascinating to learn alongside my siblings about diversifying our approaches to making a difference in areas we’re passionate about.”

Jenny emphasized the family’s connection to the water and their collective goal to support the Alliance, “Here in a lakeside community, the water we drink, the memories we make with friends, the recreational activities we do are all on Lake Michigan. And so that directly impacts myself and my surrounding neighbors and friends.”

### Vision for the Future: A Hopeful Horizon

Looking forward, the Solberg siblings articulate a unified vision of hope and unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship. Sarah emphasized the significance of equitable access to natural resources, envisioning a future where the Great Lakes remain a bountiful, accessible treasure for all. This vision is bolstered by their collective efforts to support the Alliance for the Great Lakes and other environmental causes, underscoring the impact of family unity in advancing their goals.

Through generations of intentional living and advocacy, the Solberg family has woven a rich tapestry of care for the waters we all share. Their story illustrates the profound impact a single family can have on protecting our planet’s most precious resources. As they stand together with the Alliance for the Great Lakes, their efforts illustrate the power of legacy, love, and the deep, unbreakable bonds that tie us to the earth and each other.

### Ancestral Ties to the Water

Travis Solberg vividly portrayed the family’s deep-rooted connection to water. “Speaking of the elders,” Travis begins, “our father’s father was in the Navy on the Great Lakes.” He continues, “Our mother’s parents grew up in the Des Plaines River (and I&M Canal) valley in Lockport, IL. They owned a handmade lake house in Wisconsin that they would frequent to become expert water skiers. Her brother, Roger Carlstrom, let my family experience Lake Michigan on his sailboat. Both my mother’s and father’s parents ended up living in North Shore communities of Chicago. Finally, our parents chose to live across a pond in a lake community where we swam and started our love of canoeing. All of our family, our ancestors, cherish the lure of bodies of water; it’s in our psyche.”

Reflecting on the importance of place and her motivation for protecting the water, Jenny Solberg shared, “I’m in a lakeside community now, and I’m excited because I hope it’s easy to make an impact.” Her words echo the Solberg family’s longstanding commitment to preserving the natural beauty of Lake Michigan, highlighting the personal responsibility she feels towards environmental stewardship.

### Solberg Manufacturing: A Legacy of Innovation and Stewardship

The Solbergs’ commitment transcends environmental activism. Solberg Manufacturing, founded on innovation, quality, and responsibility, mirrors its water stewardship. Established in 1968, the company has emerged as a frontrunner in industrial filtration while championing sustainability as a Certified B Corporation, reflecting the Solbergs’ all-encompassing guardianship approach.

# DC Update: Are Great Lakes Priorities Advancing After a Year of Divided Government?

In our latest blog, “DC Update: Are Great Lakes Priorities Advancing After a Year of Divided Government?” Don Jodrey, the Alliance’s Director of Federal Government Relations, shares his insights from Washington, DC, on the state of Great Lakes policy amidst a challenging political landscape. This year, we’ve witnessed the impact of a divided Congress on our ambitious Great Lakes federal policy agenda, grappling with major policy disagreements and funding challenges that threaten to stall critical environmental initiatives.

From water infrastructure funding battles to the uncertain fate of the Farm Bill and plastic pollution legislation, the post

dives into the legislative hurdles and successes of the past year. Despite these challenges, the bipartisan support for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and significant state contributions to invasive carp protections highlight a path forward. The blog also touches on the EPA’s actions affecting the Great Lakes, emphasizing the importance of community advocacy in shaping future policies. For a more comprehensive look at these issues and to understand how your voice can make a difference, we invite you to read the full article on [www.greatlakes.org](http://www.greatlakes.org). Join us in advocating for a healthier, more sustainable Great Lakes region.

## 2024 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES



### Plastic Pollution

Pass legislation to stop plastic pollution



### Invasive Species

Protect the Great Lakes from aquatic invasive species



### Agriculture

Pass a Farm Bill that prioritizes clean water



### Water Infrastructure

Increase water infrastructure funding, prioritize funding for communities most in need



### Great Lakes Restoration

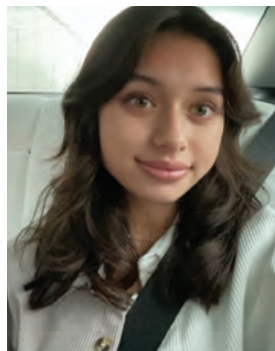
Update and fund Great Lakes restoration programs

## One Earth: Young Filmmakers Shine A Light on Great Lakes Issues

The One Earth Young Filmmakers Contest recently spotlighted the environmental fervor of young creatives, emphasizing the pressing ecological issues facing the Great Lakes.

**Asiana Spaw**, a high school senior from Northwest Indiana, clinched the 2023 College Level Award with her insightful film, “*Microplastics: Not a Small Problem*,” addressing the pervasive issue of microplastics in the Great Lakes. Her choice to allocate her matching grant to the Alliance for the Great Lakes underscores the alignment of her advocacy with the Alliance’s mission to combat plastic pollution.

**Andrew Older**, an 8th grader from Oak Park-River Forest, Illinois, earned an Honorable Mention for his film “*Invasive Fish in the Des Plaines River*,” spotlighting the impact of invasive species on local ecosystems. Andrew’s film, which encourages support for organizations fighting the spread of invasive species, including the Alliance, premiered at the festival’s Honorable Mention Awards Virtual Screening.



These young filmmakers not only raise awareness through their cinematic talents but also inspire action towards preserving the Great Lakes. Their dedication resonates with the Alliance for the Great Lakes’ efforts in policy advocacy and on-the-ground initiatives like Adopt-a-Beach cleanups. Asiana and Andrew’s contributions through film and philanthropy exemplify the significant impact of youth engagement in environmental activism and conservation.



Left to right: Asiana Spaw, One Earth Young Filmmakers Contest Winner; Matt Altstiel, Alliance for the Great Lakes Vice President for Development; Genevieve Fletcher, Individual Giving Manager; Molly Flanagan, Chief Operating Officer & Vice President for Programs

## SAVE THE DATE



### Adopt-a-Beach Spring Kickoff 2024 April 26 – April 28

Spring is just around the corner. That means Adopt-a-Beach season will start before you know it! So mark your calendar: Adopt-a-Beach Spring Kickoff is Friday, April 26 – Sunday, April 28.

Every year, thousands of Adopt-a-Beach volunteers come together to keep our Great Lakes beaches clean. It's easy to join in. Visit the **Adopt-a-Beach website** and **find a cleanup near you**.

If you don't see a cleanup that works for you, **become a Team Leader** and set up one of your own.

Learn more at [adopt.greatlakes.org](https://adopt.greatlakes.org).



### Join us for our 2024 Great Blue Benefit at the Columbia Yacht Club in Chicago. Thursday, June 13 6-9 p.m.

We hope you'll join us on **Thursday, June 13, 2024**, at the Columbia Yacht Club for the Great Blue Benefit—a celebratory evening dedicated to safeguarding our precious Great Lakes.

Enjoy live music, cocktails, beer and wine, and a scrumptious buffet while mingling with others who share a deep passion for clean water, all against the breathtaking backdrop of Lake Michigan and the stunning Chicago skyline.

Interested in being a sponsor for this year's benefit? Contact Genevieve Fletcher at [gletcher@greatlakes.org](mailto:gletcher@greatlakes.org) or 312-445-9736.

## TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

We would love to hear your feedback about our Watermarks newsletter. We are also happy to answer your questions about pressing Great Lakes issues.

Email us at [alliance@greatlakes.org](mailto:alliance@greatlakes.org)



The Alliance for the Great Lakes is a nonpartisan nonprofit working across the region to protect our most precious resource: the fresh, clean, and natural waters of the Great Lakes.

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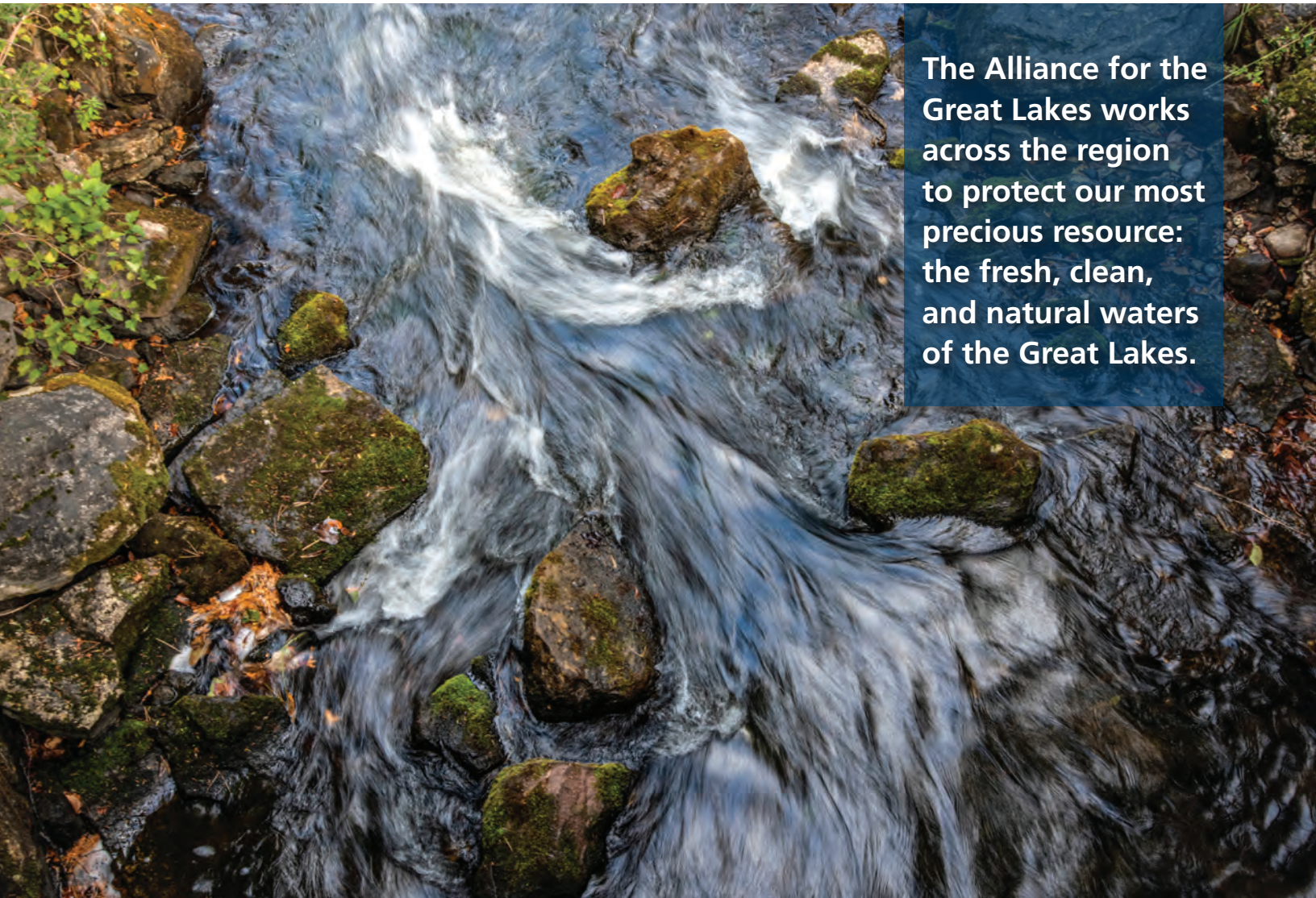
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**The Alliance for the Great Lakes works across the region to protect our most precious resource: the fresh, clean, and natural waters of the Great Lakes.**