



Protecting the Common Waters of the Great Lakes Basin
Through Public Trust Solutions

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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During National Groundwater Awareness Week March 10-16, FLOW calls for dramatic state reforms to protect the Sixth Great Lake, the water lying beneath Michigan's ground

Traverse City, Mich. – **Michigan is called the Great Lakes state, but is a poor steward of the sixth Great Lake, the water lying beneath Michigan's ground.** During [National Groundwater Awareness Week](#) March 10-16, FLOW, a Traverse City-based water law and policy center, is calling for state-level reforms to strengthen protection of Michigan's groundwater.

Groundwater is an immense and invisible resource. The volume of groundwater in the Great Lakes watershed is roughly equal to the volume of Lake Huron. Often overlooked because it is out of sight, Michigan's groundwater is a giant asset and life-giving resource that fills wells, grows crops, fuels industry, and replenishes the Great Lakes.

FLOW has been investigating Michigan groundwater policies and problems for more than a year. In September 2018, we released a report, [The Sixth Great Lake: The Emergency Threatening Michigan's Overlooked Groundwater Resource](#). The report documents the importance of, and profound threats to, Michigan's groundwater, including these key facts:

- **Michigan has more private drinking water wells** than any other state.
- **About 45% of the state's population** depends on groundwater as its drinking water source.
- **About 64 million gallons of groundwater** are extracted daily from on-site wells by Michigan industries.
- **Over 260 million gallons of groundwater** are withdrawn daily in Michigan for irrigation.
- **As much as 42%** of the water in the Great Lakes originates from groundwater.

"For a resource so vital to human health and the economy, Michigan's groundwater is neglected in both policy and practice," said **Liz Kirkwood, FLOW's executive director**. "It's time Michigan made this 'out of sight, out of mind' resource a priority for protection."

In addition to our call for policy reform, as detailed below, FLOW throughout Groundwater Awareness Week also is releasing an inspiring video narrated by poet and author Anne-Marie Oomen; two podcasts developed by writer and broadcast professional Sally Eisele; blog posts by FLOW experts shining a spotlight on PFAS and other groundwater pollution problems and protective solutions; and a fact sheet summing it all up.

Of the 50 states, only Michigan lacks a statewide law protecting groundwater from septic systems – and there are an estimated 130,000 leaking septic systems within Michigan's borders. Other major threats include an estimated

6,000 contamination sites for which no private or public funding is available and widespread nitrate contamination from agricultural practices.

FLOW's groundwater reform agenda includes:

Law and policy reform

- **The state of Michigan should articulate a groundwater policy and law** that reaffirms groundwater is directly connected to surface water as part of a single hydrologic cycle, and protects this paramount public trust resource from impairment and degradation. This will assure it can serve as a sustainable source of safe drinking water, health, and sustenance, support healthy ecosystems, and serve other societal needs.
- **The Michigan Legislature should declare groundwater sources for public water works systems legally protected zones**, and impose special standards for groundwater protection and restoration if or when contaminated.
- **The Michigan Legislature should enact a law requiring all septic systems to be periodically inspected and properly maintained**, making Michigan the 50th and last state to adopt a uniform septic code.
- **The Michigan Legislature should appropriate adequate funds to enable municipalities**, MSU Extension, nonprofit organizations, and others to conduct a statewide groundwater education program.

Cleanup

- **The state should identify a long-term funding source**, such as a voter-approved bond, and appropriate funding needed to clean up over 6,000 remaining sites with contaminated groundwater where no other viable party can be found to pay for cleanup. A reasonable estimate of the need is expenditures of \$50 million per year for the next 20 years, or \$1 billion.
- **The Michigan Legislature should end the creation of automatic legal "sacrifice zones,"** where groundwater use is restricted or banned for contaminated waters discovered after December 31, 2018. Those who contaminate groundwater after that date should be required to restore it – or if they can't cost-effectively do so, pay damages.
- **The State of Michigan should aggressively prevent, detect, and clean up nitrate pollution** resulting from farm practices and assist rural communities in obtaining safe, nitrate-free drinking water.

Research and reporting

- **The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality should publish a biennial report on the state of groundwater** in Michigan including a map and ranking of the 100 contaminated groundwater sites that pose the greatest risk to human health and the environment.
- **The State of Michigan should improve groundwater data collection and reporting** and work with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and Great Lakes states to improve understanding of the effects of groundwater contamination on Great Lakes water quality.

For more information, visit FLOW's website:

- Home page: www.FLOWforWater.org
- The Sixth Great Lake: <http://flowforwater.org/sixth-great-lake/>

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