

How Great are The Great Lakes?

Overview

The Great Lakes region is the living hub of North America, where it supplies drinking water to tens of millions of people living on both sides of the Canada-US border. The five main lakes are: Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Combined, the Great Lakes contain approximately 22% of the world's fresh surface water supply.

Geography and Stats

The Great Lakes do not only comprise the five major lakes. Indeed, the region contains numerous rivers and an estimated 35,000 islands. The total surface area of the Great Lakes is 244,100 km² – nearly the same size as the United Kingdom, and larger than the US states of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire combined!

The total volume of the Great Lakes is 6x10¹⁵ Gallons. This amount is enough to cover the 48 neighboring American States to a uniform depth of 9.5 feet (2.9 meters)!

The largest and deepest of the Great Lakes is Lake Superior. Its volume is 12,100 Km³ and its maximum depth is 1,332 ft (406 m). Its elevation is 183 m above sea level. The smallest of the Great Lakes is Lake Erie, with a maximum depth of 64 m and a volume of 484 Km³.

Lake Ontario has the lowest elevation of all the Great Lakes, standing at 74 m above sea level. The majestic Niagara Falls lie between Lakes Erie and Ontario, where there is almost 100 m difference in elevation.

Other Rivers and Water Bodies

The Great Lakes contain many smaller lakes such as Lake St. Clair, Lake Simcoe and Lake Nipigon.



A Satellite Image of the Great Lakes (Source: Wikipedia)

There are also many rivers connected to the Lakes like the Detroit River, Niagara River and St. Clair River.

Economic Importance

The Great Lakes region is a major economic centre in North America. It supports the production and transportation of goods throughout North America and the world, as the Lakes connect to Saint Lawrence River, which flows through Quebec and ultimately ends into the northern Atlantic Ocean.

Recreational sports like boating and fishing is a major industry that depends on the Great Lakes. For example, sport, commercial, and Native American fishing comprise a \$4 billion a year industry.

Environmental Challenges

The Great Lakes have been subjected to environmental and ecological stresses, including pollution from industries, overfishing and introduction of invasive species. The Governments of Canada and the United States coordinate the management of the Great Lakes and implement remedial action plans and preventative policies to protect the precious water resource and conserve it for future generations.

Source: Wikipedia