

Canada Water Agency

2026-2030 Strategic Plan



Canada
Water Agency

Agence de l'eau
du Canada

Canada

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Our Commitment to Reconciliation and Indigenous Rights

The Canada Water Agency recognizes the importance and diversity of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples' relationships to water, which are integral to their cultures, and for some nations, their spiritual beliefs. Advancing reconciliation efforts and collaborating with Indigenous peoples is an important part of our mandate. Thus, our commitment to strengthening our relationships with Indigenous partners and working collaboratively with them on freshwater stewardship spans all areas of our work.



A Message from Natasha Beeds, a Policy Advisor at the Canada Water Agency and a Water Walker

As a Black Indigenous grassroots woman of nêhiyaw, Scottish Métis, and mixed Bajan ancestry from the Treaty 6 territories of Saskatchewan – and as a mother, kôhkom, aunty, Water Walker, and Mide-Kwe from Minweyweywigaaan Midewiwin Lodge, (Roseau River First Nations and Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory) – my life is grounded in ceremony, kinship, and responsibility to my peoples, lands, waters, ancestors, and future generations. Guided by Anishinaabeg teachers, Liz Osawamick, the late Dr. Shirley Williams-Ba, the late Josephine Mandamin-Ba, and Andrew Mandamin, I have Water Walked over 15,000 kms around the Great Lakes, Kawartha Lakes, Junction Creek, and the North Saskatchewan River. Water Walks are rooted in Midewiwin ceremonies that recognize Water as a living entity connecting all of Creation.

Joining the Canada Water Agency during its formative stages has offered me an opportunity to continue working for the Water in a new way. As a Policy Advisor with the Indigenous Engagement and Partnerships team, my role is to help ensure Indigenous voices, values, and ways of knowing are respected and meaningfully reflected throughout the Agency. In this role, I remain grounded in community and ceremony, carrying forward the teachings of my late Water Walk mentors, Josephine-Ba and Shirley-Ba, who reminded us: “The Water unites us all – and the Water needs us.” This understanding - that humanity shares a collective responsibility to care for the Water to sustain all life, now and for future generations, fundamentally shapes my contributions to the Agency.

Natasha Beeds



Photo by Tom Lynn
Photography LLC

A Message from Joyce Ji, a Student at the Canada Water Agency

As a youth and a student studying Environmental Sciences, fresh water holds an important place in my heart – not only as a source of life, but also as a place for recreation, reflection, and connection. As a second-generation Chinese Canadian, studying the environment was a new idea for my family of first-generation university graduates and medical doctors. Nonetheless, they supported me and encouraged me to pursue what made me happy. My parents worked hard to instill in me a mindset of sustainability, reminding me not to waste water, to reuse materials whenever possible, and to respect the world around me. Over time, I grew to appreciate the natural world and fell in love with the environment, ultimately inspiring me to pursue a career in the environmental sector.

I now live in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and work at the Canada Water Agency headquarters. I am fortunate to be part of the Communications team and the Indigenous Engagement and Partnerships team, working at the intersection of my studies – Environmental Science and Indigenous Studies. In this role, I support engagements by applying what I have learned through university, while also bringing my own perspectives. Equally important, I am continually learning about the realities of fresh water in Canada and for Indigenous peoples.

My work is guided by the principles of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. I have been privileged to learn many teachings through my academic studies and from speaking with Elders and Knowledge Keepers within my broader community, and I strive to carry them forward in my work. Building on these teachings and experiences, I look forward to supporting the Canada Water Agency and contributing to a healthy, resilient, and collaborative freshwater future.

Joyce Ji



A Message from the President

Fresh water is more than a natural resource. **It's a necessity – essential for sustaining all life and every aspect of our way of life and prosperity in Canada.**

We're fortunate to have large amounts of fresh water flowing through our rivers and aquifers and in our lakes in Canada compared to other parts of the world.

But fresh water is unevenly distributed across the country, and most of it is underground, locked in ice and snow, or flows north away from our population and economy. Variations in water quality also exist, especially in southern Canada. In some places, water is only usable if it's treated.

Pressures on fresh water are also growing in Canada – and globally – from factors like climate change, shifting land use, pollution, rising water consumption, and infrastructure gaps, creating an uncertain water future.

I'm proud to present the Canada Water Agency's first strategic plan to show how we are working with other federal departments and agencies, provinces, territories, Indigenous peoples, and many other partners to ensure we have enough water in the right quality to meet our long-term environmental, social, and economic needs.

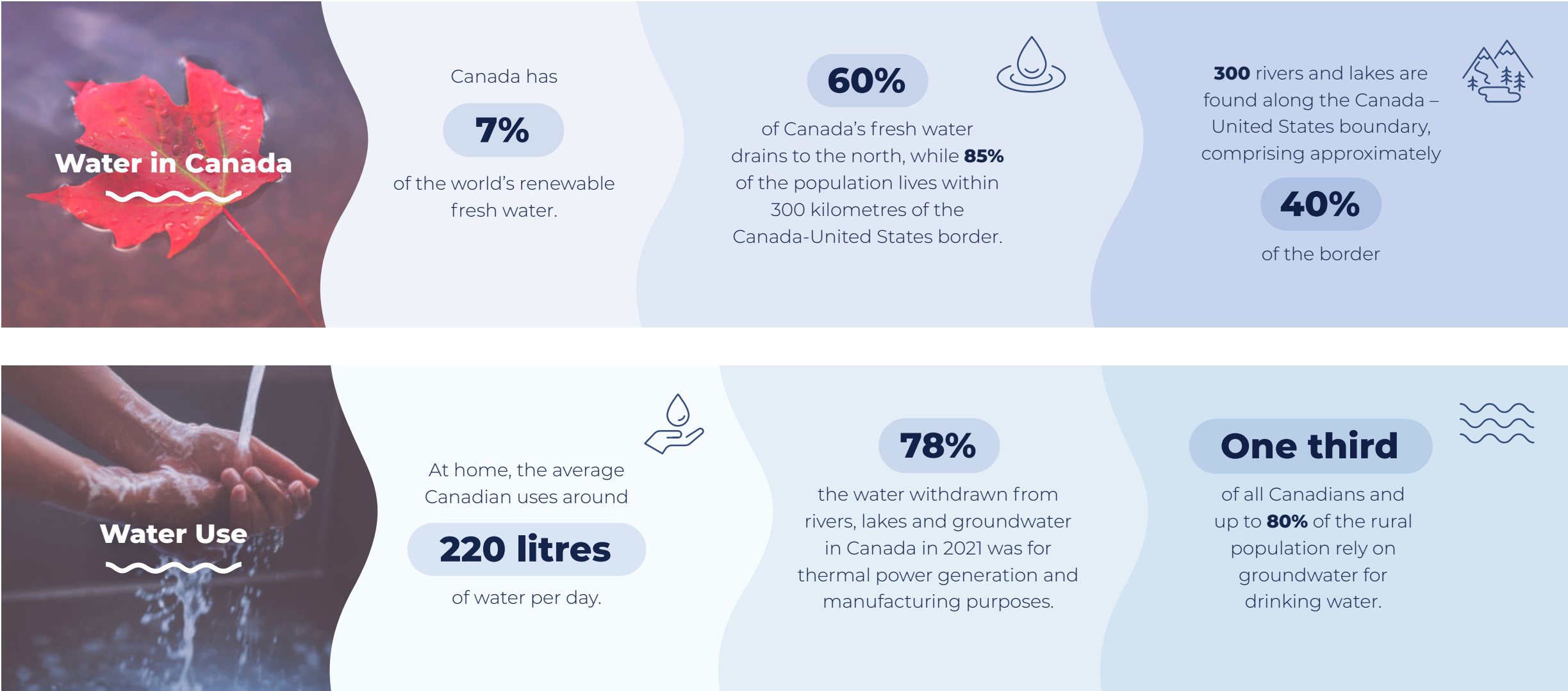
Safeguarding Canada's water future is a national imperative and shared responsibility.

Building on the contributions of partners past and present, the Agency stands ready to lead and collaborate to meet this challenge.

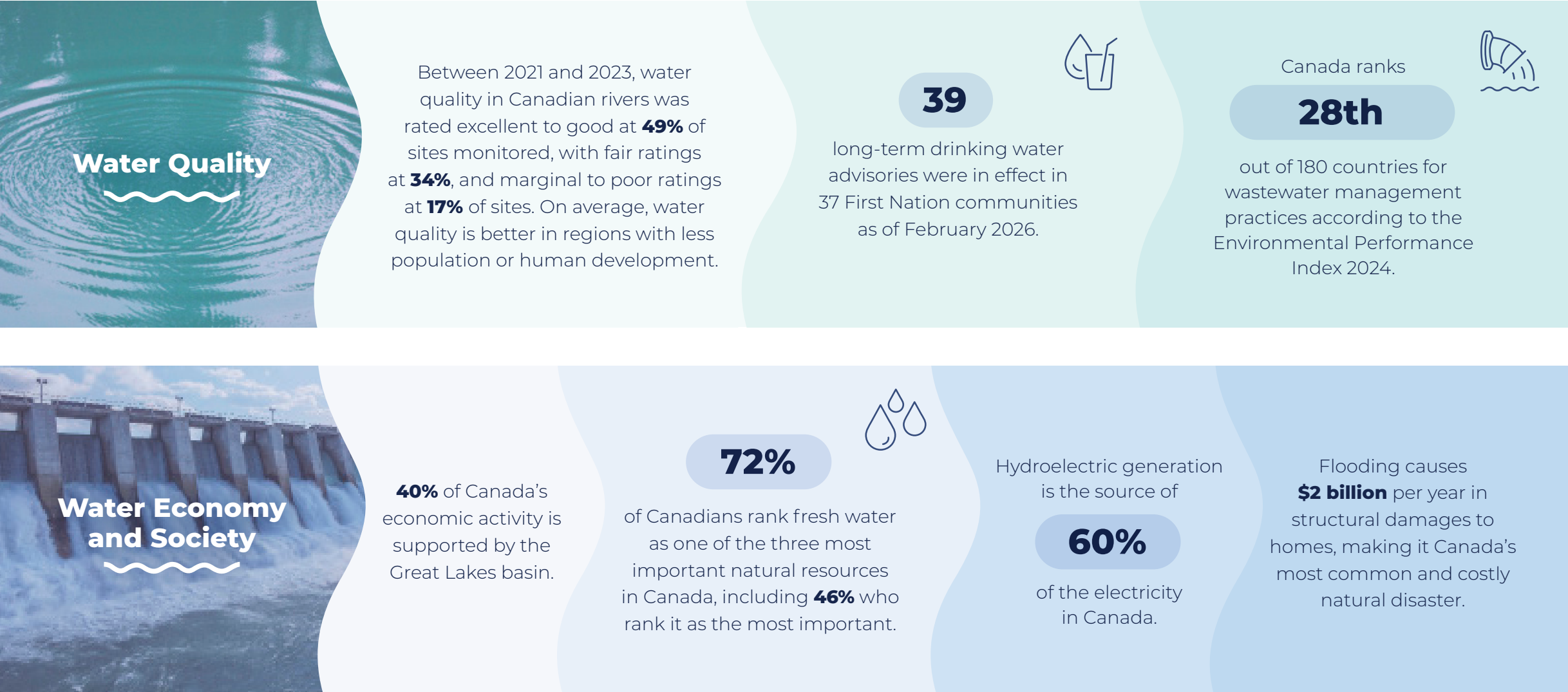
Mark Fisher



Fresh Water in Canada



Fresh Water in Canada



Please refer to the bibliographic references at the end of this document for this information.

Who We Are

The *Canada Water Agency Act* established the standalone Canada Water Agency on October 15, 2024.

Reporting to the Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, our mandate is to improve freshwater management in Canada by providing leadership, effective collaboration federally, and improved coordination and collaboration with provinces, territories, and Indigenous peoples to proactively address national and regional transboundary freshwater challenges and opportunities.

Our presence and programs span across Canada, with our headquarters in Winnipeg and regional offices that help protect and restore water quality and strengthen the overall health of major freshwater ecosystems across Canada. See the map of the Freshwater Ecosystem Initiatives in which the Agency supports regionally specific actions to restore and protect water quality and ecosystem health.

For information about the Agency's mandate, programs, funding, and human resources, please visit our website at <https://www.canada.ca/en/canada-water-agency.html>.



Building the Foundation

Our Vision

A Canada where freshwater ecosystems are managed wisely and flourish for generations to come so that all people in Canada thrive, the environment is protected, and our economy grows, from coast to coast to coast.

Our Mission

To help advance a holistic approach to freshwater management and stewardship in Canada and internationally through understanding, protecting, and restoring freshwater ecosystems; undertaking evidence-based policy research and advice; collaborating on water governance; supporting multidisciplinary science and knowledge sharing; facilitating public awareness and engagement; and striving for organizational excellence.



Our Values

To reach our vision, fulfill our mission, and shape our culture and organizational performance, we embrace the core values and ethics of the federal public sector:

› **Respect for Democracy**

› **Respect for People**

› **Integrity**

› **Stewardship**

› **Excellence**



In addition to the core values and ethics of the federal public service, in early 2024, Canada Water Agency employees worked together to identify what they are committed to:

- › **A Caring Culture** – Building an open, safe, respectful, and inclusive work environment.

- › **Honesty** – Providing fearless advice and taking a principled and pragmatic approach to decisions and actions.

- › **Thinking Things Through** – Investing in understanding problems, options, impacts, risks, and assumptions in a rigorous, inclusive way within and outside the Agency.

- › **Clarity** – Communicating choices and reasoning, priorities, roles, timelines, and success measures in plain language and accessible formats so everyone understands what we’re doing, why, how, and when.

- › **Decisiveness** – Making timely choices, committing to a path, and empowering people by providing direction that is outcome-based, clear, and consistent.

- › **Continuous Improvement** – Supporting experimentation, open dialogue and feedback, and adjustment, accepting that improvement takes time and setbacks create learning opportunities.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

Strategic Goal 1

Safeguard and Revitalize

We will continue to collaborate closely with provinces, territories, Indigenous peoples, and others to maximize efforts to restore and protect the integrity of freshwater ecosystems of significant national interest so that they are healthy and support the environmental, social, and economic needs of future generations.



Objectives

- 1.1 **Safeguard:** Conserve and protect freshwater ecosystems of national significance with good to excellent health to maintain ecosystem services and functions and improve their resilience to landscape and environmental change.
- 1.2 **Revitalize:** Work to address the most pressing water quality and ecosystem health challenges to restore degraded freshwater ecosystems of national significance, including legacy contaminated sites, known as Areas of Concern, in the Great Lakes.





Strategic Goal 2

Advise and Coordinate

We will bring together diverse perspectives and interests across the federal government and our external partners to foster collaborative, forward-looking research and analysis. This will enable us to deliver timely, evidence-based policy advice on Canada's most pressing water challenges and opportunities, while continuously assessing and improving the effectiveness of Canada's freshwater stewardship and management approaches.

Objectives

- 2.1 **Advise:** Work collaboratively with others to conduct evidence-based policy research and provide timely, trusted, and actionable advice to inform freshwater stewardship approaches and long-term water security priorities in Canada.
- 2.2 **Coordinate:** Strengthen collaboration among federal departments and agencies with freshwater-related responsibilities to facilitate the delivery of coherent, well-coordinated federal freshwater policies and programs that maximize impact, reduce duplication, and ensure whole-of-government engagement to support outcomes.
- 2.3 **Reflect:** Strengthen and improve our relationships with Indigenous peoples, advance reconciliation, and ensure Indigenous Knowledge Systems, rights, and partners' perspectives are respectfully reflected in all areas of the Agency's work, including in our advice to decision-makers.



Strategic Goal 3

Collaborate on Freshwater Governance

We will continue to collaborate with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous partners to establish and deliver shared frameworks and goals for stewarding waters of national significance. This collaborative approach to water governance will continue to respect jurisdictions and address the evolving needs and expectations of governments, businesses, and the public while ensuring the long-term sustainability of fresh water.



Objectives

- 3.1 **Align:** Build and maintain durable intergovernmental water governance mechanisms that align federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous perspectives and priorities to guide decision-making and coordinate action.
- 3.2 **Collaborate:** Provide leadership and professional expertise to domestic and International Joint Commission water boards and committees to help collaboratively steward boundary and transboundary freshwater ecosystems.
- 3.3 **Promote:** Advance Canada's global freshwater leadership by collaborating with domestic and international partners to promote holistic approaches to water governance, strengthen water security, and support resilient freshwater ecosystems worldwide.



Strategic Goal 4

Integrate Knowledge

We will support and fund freshwater science and deepen our understanding of Indigenous Knowledge Systems so that we can apply scientific findings and Indigenous values, perspectives, and insights to our programs and policy advice. This will accelerate the development and use of innovative solutions to restore and better use and protect fresh water.



Objectives

- 4.1 **Study:** Support and fund freshwater science and Indigenous-led science and monitoring to study change and stressors in freshwater ecosystems of national significance. This will help inform and improve on-the-ground actions and identify how ecosystems can be made more resilient to future impacts.
- 4.2 **Understand:** Work with partners to establish indicators of water quality and aquatic ecosystem health for the Agency's priority Freshwater Ecosystem Initiatives to understand current conditions, assess trends, and evaluate if they are improving, unchanging, or deteriorating over time to inform restoration and protection efforts.
- 4.3 **Connect:** Work with others to establish guidelines and principles for how freshwater information should be organized, stored, and shared in Canada. This will make it easier to find and access freshwater data, as well as use and combine data from various sources, which will strengthen decision-making and knowledge generation.
- 4.4 **Respect:** Support the documentation of and access to Indigenous Knowledge Systems in ways that uphold the First Nations Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) and the Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Stewardship (OCAS); honour the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics); and respect Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ). All work will recognize and defer to Indigenous community defined processes when communities steward and document their knowledge.

Strategic Goal 5

Communicate and Engage

We will inform and mobilize Canadians and partners to safeguard fresh water in Canada by providing plain language, evidence-based information in accessible formats to support knowledge generation and empower action. This will be supported by undertaking respectful engagements that deepen relationships and knowledge sharing, as well as strengthen trust in the Agency and expand participation in the organization's programs.



Objectives

- 5.1 **Communicate:** Tell Canada's water story in a way that connects with diverse audiences to build public awareness and encourage decision-makers, stakeholders, and Canadians to take action.
- 5.2 **Build:** Build the Agency as a trusted source by communicating data and information, science-based decisions, and progress in clear, accessible, and inclusive ways tailored to diverse audiences.
- 5.3 **Enable:** Create engagement and communication pathways that enable long-term relationships and partnerships, shared stewardship, and culturally grounded dialogues.
- 5.4 **Reinforce:** Ensure communications and engagements reflect and support reconciliation by highlighting Indigenous rights, knowledge systems, and leadership in freshwater stewardship, and by using culturally respectful and distinctions-based communication approaches.





Strategic Goal 6



Strive for Excellence

We will continue to foster organizational excellence through strong leadership, accountability, and continuous improvement. This will be supported by clear performance objectives, results monitoring, and a culture of integrity and innovation that enables the Agency to deliver on its mandate effectively and transparently.

- 6.1 **Streamline:** Streamline internal processes, including through responsible and sustainable use of artificial intelligence and other digital solutions, to improve efficiency and effectiveness.
- 6.2 **Respond:** Provide reliable, relevant, and timely corporate information for senior government officials, Parliamentarians, and Canadians.
- 6.3 **Deliver:** Ensure organizational accountabilities are clear so that high quality results are consistently achieved, while cultivating a culture of personal accountability and ownership, supported by ongoing performance management.
- 6.4 **Empower:** Attract, develop, and retain talent while strengthening workplace culture and planning for succession at all levels.
- 6.5 **Inform:** Ensure staff have timely access to critical information to do their jobs well, support decision-making, and adapt to changing conditions.
- 6.6 **Support:** Advance a people-centred culture in the Agency rooted in reconciliation, anti-racism, accessibility, support for both official languages, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

A View to the Future

In 2030, we see a future where strong, enduring partnerships enabled by the Agency are uniting diverse perspectives and empowering more Canadians than ever before, including Indigenous peoples, youth, scientists, communities, and the private sector, to take meaningful and decisive action to safeguard, restore, and responsibly use fresh water in Canada.

Through these collaborative efforts, by 2030, actions have been identified to help restore areas within the Agency's Freshwater Ecosystem Initiatives and place them on a path to recovery. At the same time, the resilience of Canada's thriving freshwater ecosystems has been strengthened to protect them from a myriad of pressures so that they remain healthy and continue supporting a clean environment as well as key economic sectors such as agriculture, energy, tourism, and manufacturing.

Above all, looking ahead to 2030, we see a future where a renewed commitment to strengthened freshwater stewardship, from coast to coast to coast, has set the foundation for sustaining essential freshwater ecosystems in Canada and supporting our social and economic well-being for generations to come, creating the conditions for a flourishing environment and a water secure future for all Canadians.



Glossary



Please note that this glossary is specific to how terms are used in this strategic plan and should not be considered definitions applicable to other Government of Canada documents or activities.

Fresh water – Water typically found in the form of rivers, lakes, groundwater, ice, and snow; does not include seawater and brackish water. Reference: Government of Canada. (2013). Water in Canada. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/water-overview/publications/water-in-canada.html>.

Governance – The processes, institutions, and actors involved in making decisions about water.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems – Due to the diversity of Indigenous cultures, traditions, and worldviews, there is no single, universally accepted definition of “Indigenous Knowledge.” Therefore, this document does not prescribe a specific definition. In general, many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people express their understandings in ways that reflect their distinct histories, languages, and relationships to places, characterizing their ways of knowing as holistic, intergenerational, place based, and central to community well being and governance.

Partner – A provincial/territorial government, an Indigenous governing body representing rights holders, municipalities, or a national government outside of Canada (e.g. the United States). The Agency has government-to-government relationships with partners and maintains these relationships through dedicated bilateral and multilateral governance mechanisms.

Stakeholder – An interested party outside the Government of Canada who is not a partner. This includes nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, industry associations, businesses, and the public. The Agency’s approach to stakeholder engagement varies widely depending on the stakeholder and the priorities of the Agency.

Transboundary Waters:

- › **Domestic Transboundary Waters** – Water bodies, such as lakes, rivers and aquifers that are located within the boundaries of two or more governing bodies within Canada, such as a province or a territory.
- › **Canada-U.S. Transboundary Waters** – These are waters along which an international boundary runs as defined in the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty, and for the purposes of this document, also includes waters which flow across the international boundary between Canada and the U.S.

Water management – The operational approaches used to ensure the adequate allocation, stewardship, and flow of water.

Water quality – Physical and/or chemical and/or biological condition of water; usually relative to standard criteria related to its use (e.g., guidelines for protection of aquatic life, standards for drinking water).

Water security – The capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of water and acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability.

Source: [Water Security and the Global Water Agenda | UN-Water](#).

Fresh Water in Canada Citations



Canada has **7%** of the world's renewable fresh water.

- › Environment and Climate Change Canada. (2025 September 25). *Water use in Canada*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-indicators/water-use.html>
-

60% of Canada's fresh water drains to the north, while 85% of the population lives within 300 kilometres of the Canada-United States border.

- › Environment and Climate Change Canada. (2021). *Water in Canada*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/water-overview/publications/water-in-canada.html>
-

300 rivers and lakes are found along the Canada – United States boundary, comprising approximately **40%** of the border.

- › Global Affairs Canada. (n.d.). *International Boundary Waters Treaty Act*. <https://www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/water-treaty-act-loi-traite-eaux.aspx?lang=eng#1>
-

At home, the average Canadian uses around **220 litres** of water per day.

- › Statistics Canada. (n.d.). Table 38-10-0271-01: *Water use, by sector*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3810027101>
-

78% of the water withdrawn from rivers, lakes and groundwater in Canada in 2021 was for thermal power generation and manufacturing purposes.

- › Environment and Climate Change Canada. (n.d.). *Water use in Canada*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-indicators/water-use.html>
-

One third of all Canadians and up to **80%** of the rural population rely on groundwater for drinking water.

- › Natural Resources Canada. (n.d.). *Groundwater and aquifers in Canada*. <https://natural-resources.canada.ca/science-data/science-research/geoscience-groundwater-aquifers>
-

Between 2021 and 2023, water quality in Canadian rivers was rated excellent to good at **49%** of sites monitored, with fair ratings at **34%**, and marginal to poor ratings at **17%** of sites. On average, water quality is better in regions with less population or human development.

- › Environment and Climate Change Canada. (2025). *Water quality in Canadian rivers indicator*. https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/eccc/documents/pdf/cesindicators/water-quality/2025/Water-quality-canadian-rivers-en_2025.pdf
-

39 long-term drinking water advisories were in effect in 37 First Nation communities as of February 2026.

- › Indigenous Services Canada. (n.d.). *Drinking water advisories in First Nations communities*. <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1506514143353/1533317130660>
-

Canada ranks **28th** out of 180 countries for wastewater management practices according to the Environmental Performance Index 2024.

- › Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy. (2024). *Environmental Performance Index 2024*. <https://epi.yale.edu/downloads/2024-epi-report-20250106.pdf>
-

40% of Canada's economic activity is supported by the Great Lakes basin.

- › Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. (n.d.). *Ontario's Great Lakes strategy: Second progress report*. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-great-lakes-strategy-second-progress-report>
-

72% of Canadians rank fresh water as one of the three most important natural resources in Canada, including **46%** who rank it as the most important.

- › Environment and Climate Change Canada. (2021). *Water quality in Canadian rivers*. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2021/eccc/En4-447-1-2021-eng.pdf
-

Hydroelectric generation is the source of **60%** of the electricity in Canada.

- › Canada Energy Regulator. (n.d.). *Provincial and territorial energy profiles – Canada*. <https://www.cer-rec.gc.ca/en/data-analysis/energy-markets/provincial-territorial-energy-profiles/provincial-territorial-energy-profiles-canada.html>
-

Flooding causes **\$2 billion** per year in structural damages to homes, making it Canada's most common and costly natural disaster.

- › Bank of Canada. (2024, January). *Flood risk and residential lending*. <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/2024/01/flood-risk-and-residential-lending/>
-