

# Charter Toolkit

## BOTTLED WATER:

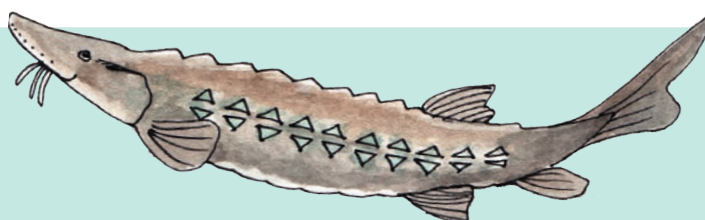
### STARTING A COMMONS CONVERSATION

**T**his Charter Toolkit resource uses the issue of bottled water to show how we can ignite a commons mindset. Below are 10 questions illustrating this mindset with each example accompanied by commentary and context. We hope these questions support anti-bottled water campaigns and highlight how conversations about 'the commons' can be made more practical. Our most valued question is the last one -- asking you the reader to form your own conversation starter for a Great Lakes commons.

This resource was designed as a social media strategy. Each image question will be shared on our Facebook page along with the commentary. It's not just the content of this Toolkit that matters, but how we communicate these ideas. We are always looking for ways to connect with our community and hear what you have to say. This is a team effort. We want your feedback and stories on how this resource aligns with your interests.

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GREAT LAKES COMMONS



# Charter Toolkit BOTTLED WATER



In a 'REimagining Activism' guide (check our bundle of community organizing resources) the authors lay out 4 key roles for system activism -- working for systemic change and looking at root causes rather than symptoms. It is a valuable guide re-imagining how we can participate in transformative change. When these 4 roles work as a team, they form a complementary and strategic alliance. They are:

## THE ACUPUNCTURIST

uses windows of opportunity in the political/economic system to target key leverage points that can help shift the system.

## THE BROKER

creates meaningful connections and learning cycles around the question of system change between movements and networks at multiple geographic levels.

## THE GARDENER

helps the new system emerge by naming, connecting, nurturing, and illuminating the pioneers in the new system.

## THE QUESTIONER

supports deliberation on fundamental questions and helps create new discourse and a cultural shift.

Help Great Lakes Commons play all of these roles so we can deepen our responsibilities to water. Which role aligns best with your set of gifts? Which role can your organization coordinate on? By engaging with and sharing this bottled water resource, you are already advancing The Questioner role.





If water permits us all to be here, why are we not asking the water's permission for our use and treatment of this gift?



**PERMISSION** Water doesn't belong to us, we belong to water. Every community in the Great Lakes is here because of its reliance on water. Water is the source of our sustenance, prosperity, and identity. When the NASA space agency goes looking for life on other planets, it's all about finding water. Think source, not resource. Read 'The Honorable Harvest' article by Robin Wall Kimmerer in our Charter Toolkit resource about Indigenous water governance. We can't have an honorable conversation about water use until we learn to ask and learn to listen.

Since Canada and the USA are treaty nations, why are they not (with their related states, provinces and municipalities) making all water governance decisions with their Great Lakes treaty partners -- the Anishinabek and Haudenosaunee nations?



**TREATY** Treaties are not receipts for land purchases, but agreements on how to share and be good commoners. No one gives away their source of livelihood, spirituality, and connection to past and future generations -- no one. Just because Europeans came with a different worldview about land & water ownership, doesn't mean Great Lakes governance is restricted to only that perspective. The current processes for giving bottled water permits in the Great Lakes don't honor the treaties. Review our Charter Toolkit resources on both Indigenous and Canada/USA water governance and be a collaborator on how to infuse water governance with treaty relationships and responsibilities.



Why are municipalities (and their taxpayers) paying to recycle millions of plastic water bottles, while their own waterworks systems are decades and billions behind for capacity and quality upgrades?



**EXTERNALITIES** Corporations like to internalize the profits and externalize the costs of their business. Is your municipality raising property taxes or cutting spending on public transit, libraries, and shared infrastructure and services? Great Lakes communities release billions of litres/gallons of raw sewage into waterways every month after heavy rains because their waterworks are a generation behind the times. Some cities can't even afford to deliver clean and affordable water to its residents impairing people's health and human rights. Bottled water companies pay pennies for massive water withdrawals and then dump their container recycling costs on taxpayers. Would a deposit system help? Should these companies pay for the lifecycle of their product? Can private profits also

benefit public needs? How can a water commons eliminate externalities? Learn about the Blue Communities project and more strategies in our community organizing bundle of Charter Toolkit resources.

What is the difference between water as a public good and water as a commons?



**PUBLIC GOOD** The biggest tragedy of the commons is that we live in a world of commons (seeds, air, soil, water - to name just a few of the elemental ones) but we don't have regulations at national or international levels that respect and protect these 'as commons'. We have only private property laws/rights and public ones -- held and given by political states. But commons are pre-state, intra-state, and also post-election. Commons existed long before Canada and the USA were established, move between political boundaries, and need protection between many generations not 4-year campaigns. Protecting water as a public good maintains important controls over trade, privatization and commercialism. But governments can't be trusted with an open licence to control the commons. Our

electoral systems are in need of deep democratic repair and under the current rules, who speaks for the water, for non-human life, and for future generations? How participatory and accountable are institutions governing our 'public goods'? Commoning (the practice of enlivening a commons) is far more than paying taxes and voting. Check out our Charter Toolkit resources on community visioning and organizing.



How does a society dependent on bottled water (through lifestyles and emergencies) organize political and economic power to invest shared resources guaranteeing the human right to water?



Since the Great Lakes are an inter-connected watershed, why do we have different and uncoordinated processes for water withdrawal permits?



## ORGANIZING POWER

Commercialism and austerity are not the only forces fuelling our growing acceptance of bottled water in the Great Lakes. We need to feed our radical imaginations for a water commons -- a shared and sacred gift that has financial, legal, political, and social support systems. How is your interest and effort in water protection building these supports? Bottled water can be both a campaign issue and critical ignitor for the world we want. When framed as an issue of scarcity, bottled water can be accepted in times/places of abundance. Framed as an issue of waste, accepts bottled water in compostable containers. Is bottled water an indicator of a failed state? More municipal water privatization is coming unless a commons solution is named and supported. Check out our Charter Toolkit resources on community visioning and organizing and our workshop outline on water ethics (a Compass of Care).

## ONE WATERSHED

Have you heard about the Dish with One Spoon agreement? See our Charter Toolkit resource on Indigenous water governance and learn more about how the Great Lakes were governed as a commons before the European invasion. The lakes were the 'dish' while the 'one spoon' was a lesson in shared use. The bowl had to feed the circle of Chiefs, while everyone could observe the process and adjust how much they served themselves. The rules for corporations taking Great Lakes water for bottling is the opposite of this above agreement. [Read our blog post](#) (link below) on the lack of reporting, monitoring, and overall coordination between states and provinces when granting bottled water permits. Governments are unilaterally giving permits on shared watersheds with minimalist opportunities for public participation and oversight across the basin (bowl). Check out our primer on Canada/USA water governance for a basin-wide scan of relevant water agencies and rules.

<http://www.greatlakescommons.org/our-blog-b/2016/8/whos-counting-mapping-bottled-water-in-the-great-lakes>



If bottled water is the option for rural and Indigenous communities without access to clean drinking water, shouldn't we be asking how their historic water sources are now polluted?



How is it ethical or efficient to pollute water to make plastic water bottles, spend money on marketing and filtering, and then pollute this water again by putting it in plastic bottles leaching chemicals back into the water?



## SOURCE POLLUTION

Water shut offs, contaminated wells, and mistrust over the quality of tap water are serious issues. Many communities don't have functional water purifying plants and have waited decades for governments to provide this human right. While we advocate to get these communities drinking water access, consider why their local water sources are contaminated. Water connects us all. Hydro dams, mining, and fossil fuel projects put mercury, heavy metals, and carcinogens in the water. These projects power our homes and feed our consumerism, so how can we work for source protection as well as treatment plants? Insects and animals don't drink tap water, yet their health impacts our own. When it comes to the water cycle, all life is downstream. Check our Plastics Action Kit as one of the Charter Toolkit resources making consumer and water/body connections.

## MARKET ETHICS

The lifecycle of bottled water starts with making plastic. This process not only uses massive amounts of water, but also pollutes it with petro-chemicals. Oil extraction, train and pipeline transportation, and upgrading refineries contaminate water, soil, and air. Bottled water brands promoting purity and health are trading in pure fantasy. Even after partial treatment, new doses of hormone-disrupting chemicals leach back into bottled water. Even bacterial contamination is harder to catch since bottled water is less regulated for public safety than tap water in the Great Lakes. Let bottled water be a good example of why the market is not a more effective mode of delivering universal needs. Let commoning guide our water ethics instead. For more on plastics, our water bodies, and water ethics, check out our Plastics Action Kit and our Compass of Care workshop in this series of Charter Toolkit resources.



# Charter Toolkit BOTTLED WATER



What is the permit process for bottled water companies using municipal tap water facilities for their product and how is this permit and monitoring data shared?



**PRIVATE PUBLICS** The public-private water spectrum gets very confusing since 50% of our bottled water is just filtered tap water. This is a product that is not needed unless there is an emergency and dumps billions of plastic bottles in municipal recycling programs and across the landscape. During our research and mapping of bottled water in the Great Lakes, we were unable to access any data about municipalities selling their water to corporations. Pepsi (Aquafina) buys tap water from the City of Mississauga. Coke (Dasani) buys tap water from the City of Brampton. The terms and prices for these public purchases are not part of the permit to take water process in Ontario. A commons requires transparency and accountability. This practice has none. How can we be good water commoners when we don't have access to the

right information and inclusive decision-making procedures? Use and adapt our community organizing resources in our Charter Toolkit and read our full blog post on bottled water in the Great Lakes: <http://www.greatlakescommons.org/our-blog-b/2016/8/whos-counting-mapping-bottled-water-in-the-great-lakes>

If you wanted to collaboratively and constructively use the issues around bottled water to organize a scaled, equitable, participatory, and restorative foundation for a Great Lakes Commons, what is your conversation starting question?



**YOUR QUESTION** For our Charter Toolkit (a preliminary set of resources for building a Great Lakes Commons) we posed 9 critical questions about bottled water. We wanted to illustrate how a water-commons approach could offer insight and engagement on one of the many pressing Great Lakes threats. We are learning how to combine campaign organizing with systemic change. We are challenging the systems of colonization, capitalism, and consent and aligning with and building up beautiful solutions. Join us. Send us your commons conversation starter and we'll add it our list.

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