






GREAT LAKES SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS | DRINKING WATER

The Great Lakes offer valuable ecosystem services, including providing **drinking water** to many of the region’s inhabitants. Regional leaders and advocates who understand their water quality, reliability, affordability, and constituents’ trust in their drinking water are well-positioned to influence management and policy decisions.

This table highlights key indicators of Great Lakes sustainability through the lens of **drinking water**.

INDICATOR		DESCRIPTION
Reliability	 Water Affordability	Water affordability is measured using yearly water and sewer expenses as compared to household income. Calculating this measure across the basin—and across demographic variables—gives policymakers, activists, and the general population insight into affordability concerns, including their magnitude and changes over time. This indicator measures the equity, as well as the sustainability, of water systems.
	 Drinking Water Advisories	Both drinking water boil advisories and do-not-drink advisories fall under this indicator. These advisories require public announcements, which often include the reason for the advisory. Therefore this indicator speaks both to water quality across basin (in the form of possible bacterial contamination) and to system reliability (in the form of the number of main breaks). The indicator also addresses equity by identifying areas of chronic/long-lasting advisories.
Quality	 Water and Sewer Infrastructure Funding and Gap	Aging infrastructure is one of the main drivers of water cost in the basin. Comparing infrastructure expenditures to a system’s infrastructure needs highlights both current investment and funding gaps. Both current funding and long-term needs contribute to water system sustainability, reliability, and future cost—and therefore equity.
	 Drinking Water Quality	While water systems track water quality thoroughly, utilities generally stop monitoring water at the property line (unless required to test under regulations). Measuring water quality at tap provides crucial information on the impacts of water quality on households. This indicator will report on water quality at tap to the extent this data exists under rules such as the Michigan Lead and Copper Rule, and will report other regulated and unregulated contaminants that are measured throughout the water system.
Public Perception	 Trust in Tap Water and Bottled Water Consumption	Public trust in tap water reflects consumers’ trust in their provider and the source of their drinking water. Tracking public trust over time is a way to measure the effectiveness of policy initiatives that address quality issues. Low or declining public trust may highlight areas that have rising or long-standing water issues, or where there is inherent mistrust of water suppliers. The amount of bottled water purchased is also a potential indicator of trust in drinking water. Such an indicator can be assessed at the household or community level.

