



Press Release

Unseen pollution. Unseen plastics. Unseen toxics. Unseen changemakers.

All-female crews from Canada and the USA are sailing together for the first time this summer on all five of the Great Lakes, Lake St Clair and the St Lawrence River to shed new light on the link between human health and plastic in the world's waterways.

The crews will be made up of women from a range of backgrounds including exploration, sport, science, technology, enterprise and the arts. But most importantly, they are all Great Lakes residents passionate about protecting our water for future generations. These Lead Boats will be conducting sampling for plastics, specifically microplastics, as well as chemicals and toxics. The data collected will be provided to multiple organisations, including the United Nations, to raise awareness of their presence but also help reduce plastic and toxic pollution.

However, the event isn't limited to these all-female crews. This one-day mass engagement event, taking place throughout the Great Lakes region, aims to be the **world's largest simultaneous sampling for microplastics in history**. That means eXXpedition Great Lakes 2016 is inviting everyone and anyone – male, female, adult, child, solo or in groups – to take part in whatever way they can, wherever they can. The day is designed to celebrate our love for the Great Lakes through conducting citizen science on all its waterways, from a backyard river to the middle of a Great Lake. The aim is that no matter how participants can access the Great Lakes and its connecting waterways, whether it's canoeing, kayaking, stand up paddleboarding, swimming or even just walking, everyone can be a part of this event and a part of the solution.

Partnered with **Adventurers & Scientists for Conservation**, participants can take a water sample for the Worldwide Microplastics Project and have their sample analysed for free. The event has also partnered with two clean-up organisations, the **Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup** in Canada and **Alliance for the Great Lakes' Adopt-a-Beach** program in the USA, to help facilitate meaningful clean-ups throughout the region that contribute to global datasets, action and awareness.

Increasing concern about the potential link between plastics in the environment and human health have been growing since 2013, with evidence that [microplastics may be able to transfer toxic pollutants and chemicals](#) and enter the food chain. It was this topic in particular that led to the creation of eXXpedition.

Message from eXXpedition Great Lakes Mission Leader, Jennifer Pate:

"eXXpedition has spent the past two years sailing the Atlantic Ocean, across the mouth of the Amazon River, along the coast of Norway and through the Caribbean Sea collecting samples of plastic and toxic pollution. We know they are out there. We were alarmed by the high levels of persistent organic pollutants in our world's waterways, the effects they could have on our bodies and above all – the fact that these issues go unseen, and are rarely talked about. By experiencing the problem and the research first hand, I knew I had to bring the eXXpedition mission and vision back home to the Great Lakes – so this event was born! In parts of the Great Lakes we have a higher density of microplastics than in any of the Ocean gyres. The problem isn't just out there in the Oceans, but it's right here in our backyard, in our lakes and on our dinner plates. We are all a part of the problem, but that means we are also all an integral part of the solution. That's why we are holding this event, to give people an opportunity to change the story and create a healthier future, not only for the Great Lakes, but also for the Oceans, the planet and themselves."

Message from eXXpedition Great Lakes Science Lead, Professor Sherri Mason:

"The Great Lakes are the largest freshwater ecosystem in the world, and they are magnificent. We are blessed to call them home. Unfortunately since the dawn of the industrial revolution they have been used as a dumping ground, a waste disposal area, a bad habit that in part sparked the awareness for environmental protections like the Clean Water Act, and the Great Lakes are improving as a result. Our work has led to the awareness that we are polluting them in a whole new way, with a whole new material: plastic. The problem with plastic is that it doesn't biodegrade, it photo-degrades into smaller and smaller pieces, while largely maintaining its same chemical structure. As a result we are finding these microplastics by the tens of thousands scattered across the lake surface and within the fish and other aquatic organisms that live in these waters. Because these plastics are so small understanding the realities of this problem can be difficult. We tend to like to see to believe. Events like eXXpedition Great Lakes 2016 are so critical to making the unseen seen and thereby raising awareness. Getting people out doing the science helps all of us to understand the problem, but also helps us to appreciate the amazing natural wonder that are the Great Lakes."

How people can get involved

eXXpedition Great Lakes is currently looking for a diverse range of applicants to take part on the all-female Lead Boats and also for land-based Community Leads throughout the Great Lakes region. If interested, please apply at: www.eXXpedition.com/apply.

Registration is also open for anyone and everyone who wants to take part from where they are on the 20th August 2016. The registration form only takes a few minutes to complete and can be found at: www.eXXpedition.com/greatlakes2016.

Participants are encouraged to share their stories through social media and multi-media platforms. We are working with our partners, **Love Your Greats**, to create collaborative engagement opportunities. These will be shared with participants who register, in the Information Package to be sent out throughout the summer. For now, people can connect with us through Twitter (@eXXpedition), Instagram (@eXXpeditiongirls) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/greatlakes2016). Official hashtags for the day are #loveyourgreats #eXXpeditiongreatlakes

Any queries and media requests should be sent to: jen@eXXpedition.com

More information

eXXpedition is a series of all-female voyages with a long-term engagement programme that explores the unseen plastics and toxics inside our waters and ourselves. Two women who sailed across the Atlantic Ocean on the first eXXpedition in 2014, Jennifer Pate & Elaine McKinnon, are bringing this mission and vision to the Great Lakes this summer.

On the 20th August 2016, the newest eXXpedition will take place, with **all-female crews will lead the way on this world-first event in the Great Lakes**, raising awareness of toxic pollution and its impacts on public health.

Scientists estimate that **everyone alive today carries at least 700 contaminants** within our bodies, most of which have not been well studied. There is an evidence base building that this **exposure to chemicals is impacting health, and female specific disease research has a low public profile in the media**, whilst there is also an imbalance in research funding directed towards gender specific disease.

As the women sail, **they will sample the Great Lakes waterways for plastics and toxics**. Plastics will be sampled according to protocols developed by the 5 Gyres Institute. Water samples will be collected and analysed for the presence of toxics and microplastics.

However, the solution to this environmental and human health issue demands effort from everyone. These crews are **inviting citizens throughout the Great Lakes region to join them**, by taking water samples for Adventurers & Scientists for Conservation's Worldwide Microplastics Project, as well as conducting shoreline clean-ups for the Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup in Canada and the Alliance for the Great Lakes' Adopt-a-Beach program in the USA.

Data collected by the Lead Boats and all participants will contribute to growing open source global databases documenting plastic and toxic pollution and their impacts on biodiversity and waterway health.

This event aims to be the world's largest simultaneous sampling for microplastics in history. As well as conducting water sampling and shoreline clean-ups, eXXpedition Great Lakes is encouraging participants to become Community Leads, planning events in their local area on the day to maximise engagement, from plastic-free BBQs to film screenings and music concerts.

This event is designed to encourage citizens across the region to see the 20th August as a day to appreciate and celebrate the Great Lakes, while providing the opportunity to be a part of creating a healthier future for the world's waterways. We see eXXpedition Great Lakes as the first of what will become an annual "**Love Your Greats**" day.

www.eXXpedition.com/greatlakes2016

Our partners include: Adventurers & Scientists for Conservation, Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup, Alliance for the Great Lakes' Adopt-a-Beach Program, Love Your Greats, Great Lakes Commons, [Mission Blue](#), [Ocean elders](#), CoppaFeel!, 5 Gyres Institute, UN Safe Planet Campaign, ONCA, Girls in Tech, [Biodiversity Research Institute](#), [University of Georgia](#), [Marine Debris Tracker](#).

Lake Leads have been chosen because of their dedication to Great Lakes health and protection, as well as their outstanding research on microplastics in the environment.

For more information, contact information and full crewmember biographies, contact Mission Leader, Jennifer Pate on: jen@eXXpedition.com

_____Ends