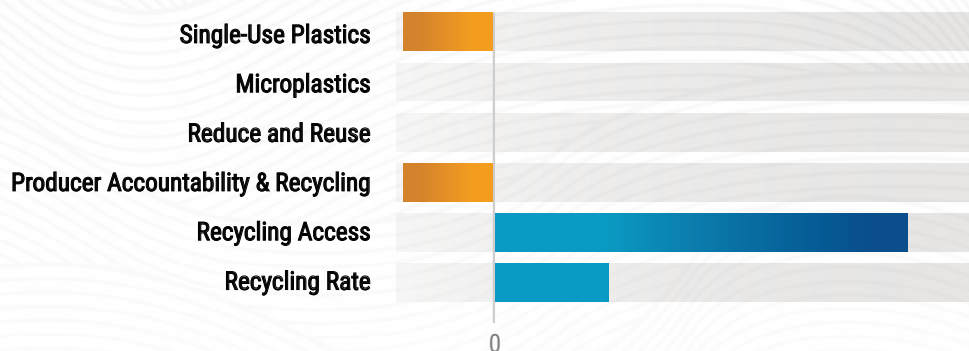


# United States OF PLASTICS

## Wisconsin

GREAT LAKES BASIN

Wisconsin's deep connection to water is woven into its identity, with over 15,000 lakes and extensive shoreline along two Great Lakes—Lake Michigan and Lake Superior. These waters support a thriving commercial and recreational fishing industry, provide drinking water to millions and are central to tourism, shipping, the state's agricultural economy and outdoor recreation. As a Great Lakes state, Wisconsin plays a critical role in the health of the world's largest surface freshwater system, which ultimately drains into the Atlantic Ocean via the St. Lawrence River.<sup>1</sup> Plastic pollution, including microplastics, has been increasingly detected in the Great Lakes. While dependent on the health of its surrounding waterways, Wisconsin has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE



*Needs Improvement*

<sup>1</sup> ["Great Lakes Facts and Figures."](#) U.S. EPA. Accessed May 2025.





### Single-Use Plastics

The state has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.<sup>2</sup>



### Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.



### Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.



### Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.<sup>3</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Wisconsin has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Given the high concentration of microplastics found in the Great Lakes and the impacts of microplastics on soil health and crop productivity,<sup>4</sup> Wisconsin should consider policies to address microplastic pollution, such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution and implementing recommendations from the International Joint Commission.<sup>5</sup>
- Despite having a high recycling access rate, Wisconsin has a relatively low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

## Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

- 1 Cigarette Butts
- 2 Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
- 3 Bottle Caps (Plastic)
- 4 Straws, Stirrers
- 5 Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
- 6 Beverage Cans
- 7 Beverage Bottles (Glass)
- 8 Grocery Bags (Plastic)
- 9 Cigar Tips
- 10 Lids (Plastic)

<sup>2</sup> AB 730, 2015–2016 Legis. (Wis. 2016).

<sup>3</sup> AB 789, 2017–2018 Legis. (Wis. 2018). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies to be harmful when they do not recover plastic and create environmental and social harm. Learn more about our [position on chemical recycling](#).

<sup>4</sup> Hoang, V.-H., et al. (2024). *Science of the Total Environment*.

<sup>5</sup> Kidd, K., et al. "Final Report of the IJC Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics." Nov. 2024.