



**Atlas of Canada 6th Edition  
(archival version)**

**Distribution of Freshwater —  
Drainage Patterns**

A drainage basin is an area that drains all precipitation received as a runoff or base flow (groundwater sources) into a particular river or set of rivers. Canada's major drainage regions are the Atlantic Ocean, Hudson Bay, Arctic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and Gulf of Mexico. A lake can be defined as any inland body of water, usually fresh water, larger than a pool or pond. Canada is covered by as many as two million lakes. The largest set of lakes, the Great Lakes, straddle the Canada-US boundary and contain 18% of the world's fresh water in lakes. Most Canadian rivers have developed since the last ice age. Almost 75% of the Canadian landmass contains water that drains northward into either the Arctic Ocean or into Hudson and James bays.

0 150 300 450 600 km

Lambert Conformal Conic Projection. Standard Parallels 49°N and 77°N

- |                             |                                    |  |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Ocean Drainage Areas</b> | <b>Populated Places</b>            | <b>Boundaries</b>                      |
| Atlantic Ocean              | 1 - 49 999                         | International                          |
| Hudson Bay                  | 50 000 - 49 999                    | Canada / Kalallit Nunaat dividing line |
| Arctic Ocean                | 50 000 - 99 999                    | EEZ (200 mile)                         |
| Pacific Ocean               | 100 000 and greater                |  |
| Gulf of Mexico              | Provincial and Territorial Capital |  |
| Internal Drainage           | National Capital                   |  |
| Regions outside Canada      |                                    |  |

**Source(s):**  
**Drainage Basins**  
River flow (discharge) was the critical factor used to delineate basin boundaries. All rivers with an annual mean flow higher than 10 000 cubic feet per second were depicted. However, land areas containing river basins that did not meet this annual mean flow threshold were assigned to the generic category "seaboard". The major river basins are the rivers that directly flow into the ocean. Within each major river basin, up to three levels of component basins were identified. In addition, water diversions larger than 1000 cubic feet per second were mapped. Natural Resources Canada, 1985. Canada-Drainage Basins [map]. National Atlas of Canada, 5th Edition.

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