

Distribution of Freshwater

Overall, Canada may be considered a freshwater-rich country: on an average annual basis, Canadian rivers discharge close to 9% of the world's renewable water supply, while Canada has less than 1% of the world's population. Water is also highly visible in Canada: probably no country in the world has as much of its surface area covered by freshwater as does Canada. Of particular note are the Great Lakes. This set of lakes, which is shared with the United States, makes up the largest surface area of freshwater found in one place anywhere in the world.

Location of Freshwater

Table 1 shows the distribution of freshwater by province and territory. Most provinces and territories have large areas covered by lakes or rivers, in particular provinces or territories that also have large areas underlain by the Canadian Shield. Readers should note when using this table that it refers to the surface area of standing water only. When assessing water availability, it is important to consult other data such as the amount of streamflow on specific river systems, data on groundwater, and, of course, climate data.

Table 1. Canadian Provinces and Territories Ranked by their Freshwater Surface Area

Provinces /Territories	Total Area (land + water) (km ²)	Freshwater Area (km ²)	Percentage of Jurisdiction Covered by Freshwater	Percentage of Total Canadian Freshwater Area
Quebec	1 542 056	176 928	11.5	19.9
Northwest Territories	1 346 106	163 021	12.1	18.3
Ontario	1 076 395	158 654	14.7	17.8
Nunavut	2 093 190	157 077	7.5	17.5
Manitoba	647 797	94 241	14.5	10.6
Saskatchewan	651 036	59 366	9.1	6.7
Newfoundland and Labrador	405 212	31 340	7.7	3.5
British Columbia	944 735	19 549	2.1	2.2
Alberta	661 848	19 531	2.9	2.2
Yukon	482 443	8 052	1.7	0.9
Nova Scotia	55 284	1 946	3.5	0.2
New Brunswick	72 908	1 458	2.0	0.2
Prince Edward Island	5 660		0.0	less than 0.1
Canada	9 984 670	891 163	8.9	100.0

Source: Canada. Natural Resources Canada. The Atlas of Canada. Facts About Canada: Land and Freshwater Areas. Ottawa, 1999.