

THE WOODSHED

Lake America? Sorry, Don. Ontario Was Here First.

Trump can call it “Lake America” on U.S. federal maps. Canada will keep calling it Lake Ontario — a name with Indigenous roots that predates the United States.

PUBLISHED 28 AUG 2026 BY NASTY CANUCK EDITORIAL DESK



Illustration: Nasty Canuck / AI-assisted.

Well, he actually did it.

On August 27, 2026, U.S. President Donald Trump signed [Executive Order 14420](#) directing the American federal government to rename Lake Ontario “**Lake America.**” The order tells the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Board on Geographic Names to update federal maps, databases, documents and communications accordingly.

So congratulations, America. You have successfully renamed Lake Ontario.

On your own paperwork.

There is, however, a rather large body of water — and several centuries of history — standing in the way of the rest of us playing along. Lake Ontario is still Lake Ontario in Canada, and the name *Ontario* is not some provincial branding exercise Donald Trump can erase with an executive order.

The lake had the name first. And it had it long before there was a United States of America.

Ontario didn't name the lake. The lake named Ontario.

This is where Trump's attempted jab at Ontario runs headfirst into history: **Lake Ontario is not named after the Province of Ontario. The province inherited the lake's name.**

The Government of Canada says the word *Ontario* is believed to come from an Iroquoian term meaning “**vast body of water**,” and records Lake Ontario being referred to by that name in the **Jesuit Relations around 1641**. Another federal account traces *Ontario* to an Iroquois word rendered as “**sparkling water**.”

Other historical interpretations render the Indigenous root as something closer to “**lake of shining waters**.” The precise English translation varies. The history does not: the name is Indigenous in origin, the lake had it first, and the province came much later.

Let's put that on the scoreboard.

Lake Ontario — name recorded around 1641.

United States of America — 1776.

Province of Ontario — 1867.

Lake America — Thursday.

Welcome to the neighbourhood.

A rather spectacular historical own-goal

Trump floated “Lake America” as the Canada–U.S. trade dispute escalated. Reuters described the executive order as part of an escalating feud with Canada that had already produced tariffs on tens of billions of dollars in cross-border trade.

The intended political message seems pretty obvious: Ontario is giving America trouble, Trump is angry with Ontario, therefore remove *Ontario* from the lake.

Take that, Canadians.

Except once you understand where the name actually comes from, the insult rather falls apart. Trump isn't removing the name of an uppity Canadian province from an American lake. He's replacing a centuries-old Indigenous-derived geographic name because he's having a political fight with a province that was named after the lake more than two centuries later. That's not quite the flex it was supposed to be.

In trying to diminish Ontario, Trump has instead drawn attention to a name whose roots reach further back into North American history than the country he proposes naming the lake after.

Oops.

“Honouring history” by deleting some of it

The title of Trump's executive order is:

“Honoring the American History of the Great Lakes and Renaming Lake Ontario as Lake America.”

And there is plenty of American Great Lakes history worth honouring. The Great Lakes have been enormously important to American commerce, industry, defence, transportation and settlement, and the executive order makes those arguments at length. Fair enough.

But there is a rather conspicuous omission. Before there was an American Great Lakes history, there was **Indigenous Great Lakes history**.

Before there was a United States, Indigenous peoples lived, travelled, traded, hunted, fished and built communities around these waters. Ontario's own geographical naming policy recognizes that geographic features in what became Ontario had Indigenous names long before European explorers arrived and describes those names as having deep cultural roots in the communities and languages that created them.

Yet an executive order purportedly intended to honour history replaces an Indigenous-derived name that has survived for centuries with one word:

America.

That's where the stunt becomes more than merely silly. It's culturally tone-deaf.

You don't honour history by deciding that history begins whenever it becomes convenient for your political message. And you certainly don't make a lake more North American by removing one of its oldest North American names.

This is where the gloves come off

Canadians are pretty good at tolerating political theatre from our neighbours. We watch, shake our heads, make a joke, say sorry for making the joke, and then make another one.

But eventually the gloves come off.

Whatever Washington chooses to call the lake inside the American federal government, the United States does not get to rename shared geography for another sovereign country. **Reuters notes** that the order applies to U.S. federal usage and does not govern what Canada, international bodies or

other organizations call the lake.

Canada's official geographical database still lists: **Lake Ontario**. Status: **Official**.

That's really the end of the jurisdictional argument.

Trump can tell American federal agencies to say **Lake America**. He can tell them to put it on American maps, order it into American databases, print it on stationery, or embroider it on bathrobes if he wants.

Knock yourself out.

Canada does not have to participate. And Canada hasn't.

That distinction is already showing up on commercial maps. Google and Apple now display “Lake America” to U.S. users, while Canadian users continue to see Lake Ontario. Geography, it turns out, can have a settings menu.

Our proposed Canadian retaliation

Naturally, such a grave aquatic provocation demands an immediate and proportionate Canadian response. After extensive consultation with ourselves, Nasty Canuck recommends: **Do absolutely nothing**.

Keep calling it Lake Ontario. Keep printing Lake Ontario on Canadian maps. Keep teaching Lake Ontario in Canadian schools. Keep sailing across it, fishing in it and sitting beside it. And keep complaining about how long it took to get there because apparently every highway in southern Ontario is under construction at the same time. Business as usual.

We do **not** need to rename Lake Erie **Lake Canada, Eh?** We do not need to designate the St. Lawrence River the **Wayne Gretzky International Freedom Canal**.

And please, for the love of everything holy, do not give Ottawa an excuse to establish a **Federal-Provincial Working Group on Bilateral Freshwater Nomenclature**. They'll create a secretariat. There will be consultations. We'll never hear the end of it. Sometimes the most Canadian response is the simplest one. **No thanks. We're good.**

Calling something yours doesn't make it yours

There is a serious point beneath the jokes.

Lake Ontario is shared by Canada and the United States. It forms part of an international boundary between Ontario and New York, and the two countries share navigation, commerce, environmental responsibilities and an enormous interconnected Great Lakes economy.

A name is not a deed of ownership. Writing **America** on a map does not extend American sovereignty, changing a federal database does not move an international border, and an executive order issued in Washington does not rewrite Canadian geography. That should be obvious. Unfortunately, here we are.

What makes the stunt more troubling is the context in which it is happening. Canada and the United States are already in a serious trade confrontation involving tariffs, jobs, supply chains, investment and industries on both sides of the border. Reuters reported that the lake renaming came amid that escalating dispute and the collapse of intensive trade negotiations between the two governments.

Those disputes affect jobs, supply chains and investment on both sides of the border. Renaming a shared lake because you're angry at the people on the other shore isn't economic strategy, diplomacy or leverage. It's political theatre written on a map.

The lake doesn't need either of us to make it great

There is something almost comical about two relatively young countries behaving as though either one invented the Great Lakes. **We didn't. You didn't. They were here.**

Indigenous peoples were here, and the names, cultures and histories surrounding those waters existed long before Ottawa and Washington began issuing proclamations about them. That should inspire a little humility on both sides of the border. Yes, **both**. Canadians don't own the history either. We inherited part of it. So did Americans.

Which is why there was actually a much better story available to Trump.

Celebrate American Great Lakes history. Celebrate the enormous industrial cities built around them. Celebrate American sailors, workers, manufacturers and communities. Celebrate the extraordinary relationship between two countries that have shared these waters peacefully for generations.

And acknowledge the Indigenous peoples whose connections to them stretch back much further than either nation.

That's a pretty good story.

Instead: **Lake America**. Because apparently every geopolitical disagreement eventually needs merchandising.

Sorry, Don. It's Lake Ontario.

Maybe the most satisfying thing about all of this is that Canada doesn't need to rage about it.

We don't need competing executive orders. We don't need performative outrage. We don't need to rename anything. **History already did the work for us.**

The name **Ontario** was recorded in connection with this place around 1641. It survived colonial empires, the American Revolution, the War of 1812 and Confederation. It survived nearly four centuries of politicians, borders, maps and arguments. And now it is supposed to disappear because trade negotiations went badly? Good luck with that.

Americans are free to call the lake **Lake America** if that's what their government requires. Canada will continue using the name listed in our official geographical records: **Lake Ontario**.

It has Indigenous roots, predates both the province and the United States, and comes from words describing the water itself long before politicians started fighting over what to call it.

We prefer politeness. We prefer being good neighbours. And we can usually take a joke. But don't mistake any of that for weakness — or assume Canadians are required to humour every ridiculous idea that drifts north across the border.

Sometimes you keep your gloves on. Sometimes you put your elbows up. And sometimes the best answer is simply:

Sorry, Don. It's Lake Ontario.

Read and share the current version

The live article at NastyCanuck.ca is the source of record and may contain corrections or updates made after this reprint was generated.

<https://www.nastycanuck.ca/lake-america-sorry-don-ontario-was-here-first/>

Reprint generated September 20, 2026.

© 2026 Nasty Canuck Media Inc. All rights reserved.

