Who Sets the Limits?

Trace how legal rules shape decisions about shared water.

7.P.2.1.C "Examine the impact of constitutions, laws, treaties, and international agreements on the limits of government, including the concepts of sovereignty and the rule of law."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one way each source shapes or limits government action. Write 1 beside a limit from the Constitution, 2 beside one from a law, 3 beside one from a treaty, and 4 beside one from an international agreement.

Rules for a Shared Lake

1. Lake Erie touches both the United States and Canada. Suppose a U.S. city wants to send treated wastewater into a stream that flows to the lake. The city cannot simply decide that its plan is safe. Under the U.S. Clean Water Act, releasing pollutants from a pipe into covered waters generally requires a permit with limits. A government agency must follow the law when it issues that permit. If the agency ignores those requirements, a court can review its decision. Government power has legal boundaries.

2. Canada and the United States are sovereign countries: each governs its own territory, but neither controls the other. Their Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 says shared boundary waters must not be polluted on one side in ways that harm health or property on the other. This treaty limits what each government may allow near shared waters. It also established the International Joint Commission, which can study shared-water problems when the governments ask. The treaty does not let the commission replace either country's government.

3. The two countries also use the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to set shared goals for improving the lakes. The agreement guides cooperation, but each country uses its own laws to carry out its commitments. In the United States, the Constitution divides federal power: Congress passes laws, the president leads the executive branch, and courts decide legal disputes. The Constitution also requires Senate approval by a two-thirds vote of senators present for a treaty. These limits reflect the rule of law: even leaders must obey legal rules.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the Clean Water Act limit what the U.S. city and the permitting agency can do?

2. How does the Boundary Waters Treaty limit both governments without taking away their sovereignty?

3. How does the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement shape government action differently from the Clean Water Act?

4. What limit does the Constitution place on making a treaty, and how does it show the rule of law?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a situation in which two sovereign countries share a river and one government wants to build a dam. In four or five sentences, describe one possible national law and one possible treaty or agreement that would limit government actions, and explain how the rule of law applies.

ANSWER KEY

Who Sets the Limits?

GRADE 7 · 7.P.2.1.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one way each source shapes or limits government action. Write 1 beside a limit from the Constitution, 2 beside one from a law, 3 beside one from a treaty, and 4 beside one from an international agreement. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the Clean Water Act limit what the U.S. city and the permitting agency can do?	**The city generally needs a permit with limits to release pollutants from a pipe into covered waters, and the agency must follow the law when issuing it.**
2	How does the Boundary Waters Treaty limit both governments without taking away their sovereignty?	**It bars pollution of shared boundary waters on one side that harms health or property on the other, while each country still governs its own territory.**
3	How does the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement shape government action differently from the Clean Water Act?	**The agreement sets shared goals and guides cooperation. The Clean Water Act sets requirements, including permits with limits, that U.S. officials must follow.**
4	What limit does the Constitution place on making a treaty, and how does it show the rule of law?	**A treaty requires Senate approval by a two-thirds vote of senators present. The president must follow that legal requirement.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Country A wants to build a dam on a river it shares with Country B, but each country makes decisions within its own borders. A national law in Country A could require officials to study the dam's effects before approving it. A treaty could require both countries to consult before either changes the river's flow. Under the rule of law, Country A's officials must follow the law and treaty even if they favor the dam.

Accept answers that distinguish each country's authority over its own territory from the limits it accepts through a treaty. For the open task, the invented law and treaty or agreement should place clear limits on government action.