



LECF-01-08

Lake Erie Coastal Ohio: Three-Year Analysis

A report to the Ohio Lake Erie Commission
By Melinda Huntley, Executive Director, Lake Erie Coastal Ohio, Inc.

6/1/2005

Problem Identification

Tourism within the Lake Erie coastal counties is big business, accounting for \$7.5 billion in direct visitor spending, \$344 million in state tax revenues, \$202 million in local taxes, and a \$2.2 billion payroll supporting 130,800 jobs. (Longwoods/Rovelstad, 2003).

However, Lake Erie tourism is also at risk. We face increased competition from surrounding states and destinations with larger advertising budgets. Seasonality limits economic growth, yet will continue to be an issue if the region only focuses on the Family Travel market. Tourist visitation patterns and demands for activities are changing. Travelers, particularly Baby Boomers with discretionary time and money to travel, are seeking history and nature – features of a community that can only be experienced if these resources are protected and preserved.

These threats to the tourism viability of Lake Erie can be viewed as opportunities. Lake Erie is Ohio's greatest natural resource, and its surrounding habitats and communities offer visitors exactly what they're seeking in today's tourism climate. Lacking was a comprehensive plan to develop the nature-based/heritage tourism market and communicate Ohio's shoreline offerings to the marketplace.

The potential exists to develop programs that draw upon the Lake Erie region's natural and cultural resources along the entire shoreline. Not every location has preeminent attractions like Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, with extensive natural habitat that concentrates the species sought-after by traveling bird watchers. But nearly all locations along the lake have unique nature-based and historical attractions and strengths that can be identified, enhanced and given the stewardship that will help northern Ohio communities realize the most economic benefit.

As the Lake Erie region promotes and protects its water quality, ethnicity, historical importance, and natural features, it will create a better quality of life, increased visitor spending, more state and local tax revenues, and the opportunity for greater economic sustainability as the perception of the region is enhanced and new businesses are attracted by our access to outdoor recreation, charming towns, authenticity, and culture – key attributes one considers when evaluating quality of life for employees.

Project Summary

In 2001, the seven coastal visitors bureaus developed a planning committee to investigate the feasibility and direction of a resource-based tourism strategy. Called the Ohio Lake Erie Heritage Area Committee, this committee oversaw hiring of Fermata, Inc. (a nature-based tourism consultant) and the development of a resource inventory and management plan. An Ohio Department of Development grant and the seven coastal visitors bureaus funded development of this plan that included stakeholder meetings and processes. In September 2001, the Lake Erie Protection Fund approved a 3-year grant to implement strategic priorities presented in the plan.

In spring 2002, Lake Erie Coastal Ohio incorporated as a nonprofit organization dedicated to implementing priorities identified in the plan. An executive director was hired, and a board was assigned.

The strategic planning process continued thru spring 2002. Since that date, numerous strategies have been implemented. Summaries of these activities are provided as Attachment A.

Initial project objectives were difficult to gauge because the project was in its infancy and the strategic planning process was not complete. As stated in the original grant application, the overall objectives of the project would coincide with the results of the strategic plan and resource inventory; however, the underlying objectives would include the following:

- Increasing off-season economic impact of tourism
- Contributing to the conservation and management of natural areas
- Encouraging local entrepreneurs to initiate development leading to new tourism products, services and jobs that focused on heritage tourism
- Promoting forms of tourism that fosters greater understanding and respect for our intrinsic values and building public advocacy for our natural areas.
- Increasing proper stewardship of the region's natural areas and cultural sites to maintain or improve ecological and historical integrity.
- Developing tourism that conserves Lake Erie's unique sense of heritage by promoting the use and redevelopment of local historic buildings and sites.

Project Results

As we embarked on this Lake Erie Coastal Ohio journey, few of us realized the potential of developing a regional tourism initiative that focused on what makes our communities unique. Traditional thoughts were challenged. Communities began to work together. Visions were created, and they became viewed as obtainable. New challenges were revealed.

Without the assistance from the Lake Erie Protection Fund grant issued by the Ohio Lake Erie Commission in 2001, few strides would have been made. The grant enabled an executive director to be hired who could focus full-time on implementing the strategies identified as being vital for success to occur. Dedicated staff and funding will be important if additional objectives are to be achieved.

Achievements are highlighted in Attachment A, and they are identified in correlation with strategic actions identified in order to meet the above objectives:

- Promoting Lake Erie's Natural and Historical Features
- Educating Resource Managers, Community Leaders, and the Tourism Community
- Researching Existing Customers, Value of Tourism, and the Importance of Resource Integrity to Economic Development
- Improving the Product by Seeking Scenic Byway Designation
- Preserving Lake Erie's Natural Landscapes and Historical Areas
- Providing Assistance and Becoming a Leader in Regional and State Tourism Development and Planning
- Educating Policymakers about the Importance of Lake Erie's Resources
- Capacity Building and Creating a Sustainable Future to Reach Goals

Challenges exist, and we need to identify strategies and proper funding to address these before substantial progress in the future can be made.

- Identification of dedicated, long-term funding to continue as a nonprofit organization – the list of achievements over the last three years can only continue to grow if funding is available for this regional effort
- Balancing revenue needs of the hospitality industry with educational and preservation goals – if we are to gain support of the tourism industry and achieve recognition as bringing additional dollars to our community, then we must get “heads in beds” through investing in promotions and advertising. At the same time, we also need to continue advocating for preservation of those intrinsic qualities that draw visitors in the first place.
- Additional staffing and office space – to achieve all that we perceive as possible, dedicated staffing would consist of an administrative position; an education coordinator to focus on working with museums and natural areas to communicate the needs of the tourism industry, enhancement tools for interpretation, and manage evaluative measures within each site; and a marketing coordinator to focus on public relations, advertising, and marketing a Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Business Partner program to generate operating revenue and support.

Project Vision

We must have a destination in sight. How will we know which road to take if we don't know where we're going? For that reason, the following vision statements were created as we envisioned the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio region 10 to 15 years from today.

The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail **links the overall recreation experiences** offered along the Ohio Lake Erie shoreline and along the lake's tributaries.

The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail **links with other Great Lakes Byways** to provide a continuous loop of the Great Lakes. International travelers from Canada and overseas, as well as Americans, explore the Great Lakes and its “hidden” charms routinely.

Recreationists find clean air, clean water, knowledgeable hosts, an abundance of wildlife and unique natural habitats, and plenty of recreational support services such as outfitters, equipment rentals and sales, locally-made and grown products, and easy-to-find natural areas to enjoy.

Visitors learn about the natural, cultural, and historical importance of Lake Erie through common interpretive signage, literature and kiosks along the byway. Businesses proudly display signage boasting their byway support and recognition as being important chapters of the “Lake Erie story.”

Motorists enjoy safe and secure travel, scenic views of Lake Erie, restored downtown districts filled with authenticity and charm reminiscent of their ethnicity and maritime heritage, and working waterfronts continuing to service the Great Lakes and the world.

Boaters find welcoming marinas and docks, and transportation to and from attractions. Visitor amenities are readily available.

Local businesses and communities benefit from a year-round tourism economy, whereby the area's resource-based attractions experience an increased source of support. Additional jobs are created, state and local tax revenues are on the rise, and new businesses have emerged.

Businesses, residents and guests all **work toward a brighter future** by using sustainable energy methods and supporting resource-based projects. They understand the importance of keeping Lake Erie clean and healthy, and they know how valuable our heritage is to our future.

Future Strategies and Objectives

These are general goals, establishing broad parameters for future work by Lake Erie Coastal Ohio, Inc. Specific goals are outlined within the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail Corridor Management Plan, within "*Strategic Plan for Developing Experiential Tourism*" developed in March 2002, and in annual strategic documents developed by the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio team. Most goals will be achieved through new cooperative partnerships and by supporting existing programs. This support will provide additional exposure of existing programs, enhancing the ability of these programs to reach end-users and creating cooperative ventures to maximize use.

EXPERIENCE GOALS

- Increase awareness and support greater access of Lake Erie and the recreational resources within its watershed consistent with resource protection and balanced growth principles for economic development and tourism.
- Develop cohesive interpretation of the Lake Erie story by linking historical, cultural and natural sites through tools such as a web site, kiosks, resource book for sites with identification of other sites with similar stories, cd/audio tour, print publications, etc.
- Develop portal site locations into outstanding visitor information/interpretive centers to educate guests and direct them to nearby sites to generate longer lengths of stay and a greater appreciation for the richness of Lake Erie's watershed resources. Portal sites have been defined as Oak Openings Preserve, Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, Middle Bass Island State Park, Old Woman Creek National Estuarine Research Reserve, Vermilion River Reservation, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Mentor Marsh Lagoons Nature Preserve and Geneva State Park.
- Provide information regarding necessary tourism support services (such as hotels, bed and breakfast inns, restaurants, etc.) to visitors and site managers to enhance the visitor experience and create identification as a regional experience.
- Develop wayfinding system to identify the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail as a regional experience through standardized visual identity for routing, sites, and directional signage.
- Inventory, promote and advocate multi-modal transportation opportunities within the Lake Erie watershed, including ferryboat, private boat, biking/hiking trails, railroad excursions, scenic air tours, etc. Encourage development of multi-modal transportation opportunities currently not available.
- Develop water trail parallel to the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail, complete with information regarding ports-of-call, dockage, outfitters, and mainland transportation to Discovery Sites.

MANAGEMENT GOALS

- Develop funding support, partnerships and cooperation with federal, state and local government agencies, NGOs, local businesses, citizens, corporations and individuals.
- Pursue All-American Road designation to provide an uninterrupted byway experience through Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. Begin discussions with Michigan and Ontario to pursue international byway designation of existing Lake Erie Circle Tour route.
- Monitor byway use, community input, site visitation, and implementation activities to ensure public needs are accommodated, as well as the interest of local communities and resource managers.
- Develop volunteer program at portal site locations to assist staff with managing Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail interpretive messages, updating real-time information data, and enhancing the visitor experience.
- Coordinate with ongoing and overlapping management programs, such as Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Park System, National Fish and Wildlife Refuge Program, Cuyahoga Valley Initiative, Oak Openings Initiative, Great Lakes Commission, Ohio Lake Erie Commission, the *Lake Erie Protection & Restoration Plan*, ODNR divisions, local watershed groups, Maumee Valley Heritage Area, the Ohio & Erie Canalway, and others.
- Conserve intrinsic values of the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail consistent with balanced growth principles of economic development and tourism.

EDUCATION GOALS

- Coordinate byway marketing and promotional efforts to promote interest in the byway area consistent with resource protection.
- Coordinate Lake Erie public awareness campaign to motivate local citizens to enhance stewardship of the lake and its watershed.
- Coordinate program for tourism suppliers and site managers for enhancing environmentally responsible practices and rewarding best practices with recognition and increased exposure.
- Outreach to watershed coordinators and others developing resource-based strategies for local communities to maintain consistency and quality of development concepts.
- Create strong interpretation framework to ensure that the Lake Erie story is accurately presented with promotional efforts, on-site interpretative efforts, and byway informational signage.
- Develop program for recruiting and assisting entrepreneurs who can provide guide services, outfitting services, cultural programs, and cultural artwork to strengthen the cultural story of Lake Erie.

PROTECTION GOALS

- Provide resource protection tools and “best practices” information for site managers throughout the watershed to ensure minimal disruption of habitat and historic features, enhance stewardship education among visitors, and communicate funding opportunities.
- Develop a Lake Erie Coastal Ohio grant program for sites to enhance interpretation and infrastructure to accommodate guests and enhance visitor experiences.
- Advocate conservation efforts by providing economic data on the value of Lake Erie’s historic, cultural and natural resources.

ATTACHMENT A**Overview of Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Accomplishments, September 2001 to May 2005****PROMOTING LAKE ERIE'S NATURAL AND HISTORICAL FEATURES**

Developed web site (www.coastalohio.com) showcasing more than 300 historic and natural areas throughout the region. Unique visitors to the site average 167,000 per year, with more than 3 million hits. Recent bird sightings and events schedules are updated weekly. Web visitors can send E-cards, download Ecoguidelines, explore books related to Lake Erie, and download Lake Erie Calling Cards to increase awareness of our resources as contributing visitors to area businesses.

Developed Toolbox for Discovery Site Managers on the web site. This section of the web site includes planning documents, links related to marketing and preservation, newsletter archives, and other materials for creating a better Lake Erie Coastal Ohio experience.

Developed Lake Erie Coastal Ohio logos, letterhead and general brochure highlighting our mission.

Distribute electronic newsletters to more than 395 stakeholders, resource managers and hospitality industry suppliers.

Created three :30 Public Service Announcements highlighting the historical and natural features of Lake Erie and encouraging local residents to discover a "World of Adventure" close to home.

Provided Lake Erie footage to Shedd Aquarium in Chicago for production of a film highlighting the Great Lakes.

Escorted no fewer than 43 travel writers on tours of the Lake Erie region between September 2002 and May 2005.

Developed press kit with Lake Erie Facts & Figures, general stories about Lake Erie Coastal Ohio attractions, photo image cd and other items. Created Media section on www.coastalohio.com with news releases, high-res photo availability and contacts.

Created photo image library with more than 1,000 images of Lake Erie that are available to Discovery Site managers, media and others.

Developed rack cards promoting www.coastalohio.com.

Developed Lake Erie Lighthouses & Maritime Adventures itinerary brochure. Distributed at seven coastal visitors bureaus, various historical sites along the shoreline, and as an online pdf file. Creating Lake Erie Gardens and Arboretum brochures.

Sent approximately 15 news releases, and assisted with stories appearing in the following media channels and publications:

CBS this Morning
Cleveland Plain Dealer

Akron Beacon Journal
Insiders Cleveland

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Sandusky Register
Lake Erie Business Journal
Columbus Dispatch
Ashtabula Gazette
Atlanta Constitution
Rochester NY Journal-News
Trust for Public Lands newsletter
Mentor's public access station
Port Clinton's public access station
Ohio Sea Grant's "Twinline"
WCPN Radio

Ohio Magazine
Ladies Home Journal
Midwest Living
North Ridgeville Press
Toledo Blade
Long Weekends
Country Living
Lorain Morning Journal
Sun Newspapers
Crain's Business Journal

Although we don't promote direct contact with the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio office (due to lack of staffing), the office assisted with at least 297 direct visitor inquiries and requests and assisted seven group tour operators/convention planners.

Coordinated and co-sponsored Point Pelee National Park Birdwatching Cruises in partnership with JET EXPRESS. Held in 2004 and 2005, these cruises hosted more than 185 birders each year. Average length of stay in Ohio was 2.5 nights.

Identified more than 300 natural and historical sites that tell the story of Lake Erie, and categorized each of these sites into specific themes that best demonstrate the diversity of Lake Erie's natural environmental and historical influence. Working with site managers from more than 190 sites, as well as with others who reviewed drafts, created an interpretive framework with the stories that need to be told to tie these sites together. Stories emphasize the natural significance, historical significance, and conservation and stewardship message of each category.

Coordinated listing of more than 180 different historical re-enactments that are available along the coastline. These individuals offer first-person characterizations of important people from our past, and they are available to site managers, group tour operators, and others to create a better experience for our traveler and to convey important information in an entertaining and accurate fashion.

EDUCATING RESOURCE MANAGERS, COMMUNITY LEADERS, AND THE TOURISM COMMUNITY

Coordinated several series of workshops for community leaders, resource managers, and hospitality industry members. Coordinated evaluation of workshops and identified future workshop topics of interest to site managers. Workshops were co-sponsored with Old Woman Creek National Estuarine Research Reserve with partial funding provided by NOAA. Workshops conducted featured the following topics:

- March 2004 Workshops in Oregon, Huron and Kirtland
Presented Lake Erie Coastal Ohio update
Green Hotels Association, Inc. provided tips for environmentally friendly practices
Provided updates as to ecology and health of Lake Erie
- October 2002 Workshops in Kirtland and Oregon
Presented Lake Erie Coastal Ohio update

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Roundtable workgroups to develop Lake Erie interpretive themes
Ohio Historical Society presented information on interpretation
Presented information on creating positive wildlife watching experiences

October 2001 Workshop in Huron sponsored by Old Woman Creek National Estuarine
Research Reserve
Portal site managers along Lake Erie Coastal Ohio region invited to attend
Provided methods for minimizing human impact on natural areas with
increased visitation

Developed Resource Guide for Discovery Site Managers with information for creating and
managing the visitor experience. Information includes facts and figures regarding Lake Erie
tourism, nature-based tourism, and heritage-based tourism. Also included was a hospitality
guidebook, a recycling guidebook, copies of Lake Erie Coastal Ohio's interpretive themes, and
tips for improving sites.

Assisted at least 47 Discovery Sites with additional statistics and information about heritage
and/or nature tourism, grants availability and other requests.

Distributed copies of "Providing Positive Wildlife Viewing Experiences" to site managers. This
publication focuses on maximizing wildlife-viewing experiences through trail design, bird blind
construction and interpretation.

Developed reference library of books available to site managers. Topics include interpretive
development, marketing, resource protection and tourism.

Presented Lake Erie Coastal Ohio and its mission to approximately 5,800 people at the following
presentations:

2005

Cleveland Botanical Gardens Staff Meeting, Cleveland, Jan. 4
Friends for the Protection of Ohio State Parks, Salt Fork Lodge, April 9
Lake Erie Firelands Tourist Council, Sandusky, April 20
"Lake Erie Ecosystems" Conference, Kent State University, April 26
Ohio Byways Links Spring Meeting, Loudenville, May 5
Historic Perrysburg Annual Meeting, Perrysburg, May 17
Geneva-on-the-Lake Annual Meeting, Geneva-on-the-Lake, May 31

2004

Cleveland Audubon Club
Ohio Wine Producers, Huron
Lorain Rotary Club, Lorain
Firelands Audubon Club, Sandusky
Sustainable Water Ways Conference, Cleveland
Sandusky River Watershed Canoe Float, Fremont
Port Clinton Kiwanis Club, Port Clinton
Sandusky Rotary, Sandusky
National Cave Convention, Put-in-Bay
CVB of Greater Cleveland Group Tour Meeting, Cleveland
Western Reserve Tourist Council, Akron
Building Connections Preservation Conference, Columbus

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Friends of Pearson Metropark, Oregon

2003

The Nature Conservancy, Ohio Chapter Board Meeting, Huron, April 25
Indiana State Tourism Conference, Indianapolis, March 26
Lake Erie Wing Watch Weekend, Huron, April 5
Ohio State Park Managers Annual Meeting, Zanesville, April 10
Great Lakes Symposium, Cleveland State University, Oct. 2
Sandusky River Watershed Coalition Development Board, Aug. 12
Press conference regarding expansion of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, Toledo, May 27
Destination Marketing Organization's University (live national phone program), July 8
H2Ohio, Cleveland, Nov. 14
Cuyahoga Planning Comm. Cuyahoga Valley Destination Consultant Team, Clev., Feb. 18
Vermilion Rotary, Vermilion, Feb. 19

2002

Maumee Valley Heritage Area Board Meeting, Perrysburg, Jan. 12
Mentor Marsh Planning Coalition, Mentor, Jan. 15
Lake Erie Firelands Tourist Council Meeting, Sandusky, Jan. 16
Division of Natural Areas and Preserves Managers Meeting, Vermilion, Jan. 30
Lake County Planning Commission Meeting, Painesville, April 24
Ohio Community Council of Developers Annual Conference, Columbus, April 24
Coastal Management Advisory Council Meeting, Port Clinton, May 26, 2005
Waterfront Regeneration Trust Conference, Toronto, Ontario, May 10
Northwest Ohio Sea Grant Advisory Council meeting, Sandusky, May 30
Toledo Area businesses at the invitation of Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, June
Western Lake Erie Basin Nature Conservancy Workshop, Gibraltar Island, June 11
Kelleys Island Chamber of Commerce Meeting, Kelleys Island, June 17
Ohio Lake Erie Commission Meeting, Vermilion, June 19
Mentor Chamber of Commerce Meeting, Vermilion, June 19
Put-in-Bay Historical Society Meeting, Put-in-Bay, July 31
Bellevue Rotary Club, Bellevue, Aug. 6
Great Lakes Commission Tour of the Lake Erie Islands
Toledo Sea Grant Advisory Council Meeting, Aug. 14
Ohio Travel Association Focus on Tourism Workshop, Put-in-Bay, Aug. 28
Lorain Rotary, Lorain, Aug. 29
Kelleys Island Audubon Membership Meeting, Kelleys Island, Sept. 9
Grand River Partners Meeting, Ashtabula, Sept. 10
National Extension Conference, Traverse City, MI, Sept. 16-18
Nat. Corps of Engineers & Natural Resource Directors Conference, Middle Bass Island, Oct. 1
Watchable Wildlife Conference, St. Paul, Minn., Oct. 18
Ohio Travel Association Fall Conference, Oct. 10
Huron Rotary, Huron, Oct. 23
Ashtabula County Convention & Visitors Bureau Meeting, Oct. 23
Ohio Coastal Resource Management Group's Anniversary Conference, Sandusky, Nov. 5
Ohio State Park's Flickinger Leadership Academy Training, Hocking Hills, Nov. 18

2001

Ohio Lake Erie Commission Meeting, Columbus, March 21
Terra Technical College, Port Clinton, May 4
Int. Assoc. of Great Lakes & St. Lawrence Seaway Mayors, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, June 8

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- International Coastal Zone Conference, Cleveland, July 17
- Ohio Lake Erie Conference, Mentor, Sept. 6
- Oak Openings Legislative Day, Toledo, Sept. 26
- Ohio Department of Natural Resources Staff Meeting, Columbus, Oct. 16
- Ohio Division of Travel & Tourism Staff Meeting, Columbus, Oct. 16
- Northwest Ohio Park Districts Directors Meeting, Toledo, Nov. 13
- Middle Bass Island State Park Planning Team, Columbus, Nov. 20
- Travel and Tourism Meeting to meet new Dept. of Development Director, Sandusky, Dec. 3
- Erie MetroParks Staff Meeting, Huron, Dec. 12

RESEARCHING EXISTING CUSTOMERS, VALUE OF TOURISM, AND IMPORTANCE OF RESOURCE INTEGRITY TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Assisted Ohio Lake Erie Commission in acquiring updated tourism economic impact information. Interpreted data for commission and provided summary of Lake Erie tourism activity.

Reviewed and summarized research conducted of nature-based tourism travelers in Ottawa, Erie and Lorain counties by Bowling Green State University.

Conducted six focus groups in Indianapolis, Columbus and Pittsburgh regarding the perception of Lake Erie. Developed final report. Coordinating workshops to present findings to stakeholders throughout the region.

Assisted The Ohio State University with potential study regarding water quality and its impact on recreational usage.

Assisted Magee Marsh Wildlife Area with on-site study of birders.

Assisted Ohio State Parks with focus group participation.

IMPROVING THE PRODUCT BY SEEKING SCENIC BYWAY DESIGNATION

Received state designation as an Ohio Scenic Byway in December 2004. Governor Bob Taft announced designation April 2005. Process included soliciting support and documentation from officials throughout the region and developing a corridor management plan detailing issues and strategies for enhancing the route.

Submitted application as an All-American Road through America's Byways™, the national scenic byways division of the Federal Highway Administration. Developed Corridor Management Plan to meet requirements of national scenic byway designation.

Provided assistance to America's Byways™ regarding development of web site showcasing the Lake Erie Coastal Trail Scenic Byway (<http://www.byways.org/browse/byways/59836/>) and Ohio's Byways (<http://www.ohiobyways.com/lakeerie2.htm>)

Contacted Great Lakes Commission regarding integration of Lake Erie Circle Tour into the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail Scenic Byway to provide better visitor service, increased visibility, and ability to access potential federal funding for route improvements.

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Contacted New York Seaway Trail and Seaway Pennsylvania regarding cooperative efforts of marketing scenic byways along Lake Erie. Began discussions with Ontario regarding cooperative development and marketing of a scenic byway route.

Began discussions with ODOT regarding timing and design of signage for scenic byways.

Attended Ohio Byways training program and America's Byways™ Resource Center workshop.

Coordinating collection of historical images that will be developed into a series of postcards by the Ohio Byways office to showcase the coastal region.

Negotiating Memorandum of Understanding with Ohio Division of Watercraft regarding designation of a "water trail" parallel to the scenic byway.

PRESERVING LAKE ERIE'S NATURAL LANDSCAPES AND HISTORICAL AREAS

Assisted with 25 preservation/acquisition projects across the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio region by providing support statistics, meeting with organizers, and/or support letters for funding.

Assisted on the Sustainable Development work group of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration.

Submitted additional information and recommendations for developing Middle Bass Island State Park as an experience highlighting nature and heritage. Communication with Ohio State Parks and consultants regarding the importance of maintaining the historical and natural integrity of the site for economic reasons.

Provided economic impact and tourism information at the request of the following agencies:

- US Commission on Ocean Policy
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Ohio Lake Management Society
- URS Corporation
- Great Lakes Commission
- World Lakes Organization
- Ohio Coastal Management Office
- Ohio State Parks
- Ohio Sea Grant
- Ohio Lake Erie Commission
- United States Geological Survey
- City of Cleveland Planning Commission
- Bowling Green State University

Attended workshops sponsored by The Nature Conservancy regarding the Lake Erie Islands as a conservation target. Participated in developing strategies to address issues identified through these workshops.

Testified before Ohio House Land-Use Committee on the economic value of tourism and our resources at the request of Rep. Kathleen Walcher, 2004.

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Testified before Congressional Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans regarding expansion of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Appearance at the request of Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur.

PROVIDING ASSISTANCE AND BECOMING A LEADER IN REGIONAL AND STATE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

Assisted with at least 24 requests from coastal visitors bureaus for additional information, help with projects, information, etc.

Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Executive Director, Melinda Huntley, served as Secretary (2003-04) and Treasurer (2004-05) of the Ohio Travel Association. Will serve as Vice President (2005-06) and President (2006-07).

Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Executive Director, Melinda Huntley, appointed to Ohio Division of Travel and Tourism Advisory Council since 2002.

Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Executive Director, Melinda Huntley, served on Ohio Heritage Areas Council and met with Ohio heritage areas and the advisory council, as well as several statewide preservation groups, to develop a strategy for reinvigorating this program.

Participated in a technical advisory taskforce for the Cuyahoga Valley Initiative, an effort to restore and reshape the Cuyahoga Valley.

Participated in Balanced Growth Committee of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission.

Assisted Ohio & Erie CanalWay with assistance in reviewing and providing input on Marketing and Interpretive plan.

EDUCATING POLICYMAKERS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF LAKE ERIE'S RESOURCES

Identified legislators touched by the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio area and sent information packets to educate these state and federal policymakers about this regional effort. Have met with several federal staffs to discuss project further.

Provided tourism planning assistance to Rep. Chris Redfern and Senator Randy Gardner for their bi-annual Put-in-Bay Legislative Days whereby they invite members of the Ohio General Assembly to tour the island.

Assisted Ohio Sea Grant with tourism planning for Ohio Sea Grant Legislative Day, a bi-annual event for members of the Ohio General Assembly. Served as event co-host in 2004.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND CREATING SUSTAINABLE FUTURE TO REACH GOALS

Toured potential office space. Reviewing options and budget for establishing an outside office.

Created a Business Partner Program to support the mission of Lake Erie Coastal Ohio. Hospitality industry suppliers can join our efforts for \$250 a year and will be provided with page and links on the web site.

Created sponsorship categories for soliciting corporate sponsorship of Lake Erie Coastal Ohio. Solicitation of sponsors has not begun.

Secured several grants for furthering projects identified within the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio strategic plan, including the following:

Ohio Humanities Grant with WGTE Public Television for creating an hour-long documentary on Lake Erie. (Grant project is awaiting other funding sources and is being led by WGTE)

Ohio Coastal Management grant for PSA development and Corridor Management Plan printing. Grant project is completed. Completing final paperwork.

Ohio's Byways grant (with assistance from the Erie County Commissioners) for developing the Scenic Byways Corridor Management Plan. Grant is completed.

Lake Erie Protection Fund grant for developing a nature-based guidebook to the Lake Erie islands. This project is being conducted with The Nature Conservancy and is in the development stages.

Lake Erie Protection Fund grant for conducting focus group studies in key market areas. Grant project will be completed by October 2005.

Worked with NOAA and Old Woman Creek National Estuarine Research Reserve to conduct workshops for site managers of historic and natural areas, members of the hospitality industry, and community leaders.