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**LAKE ERIE AWARDS PRESENTED TO SHIPWRECK PRESERVATION ORGANIZATION AND TO A
LEADER OF CUYAHOGA RIVER PROTECTION EFFORTS**

COLUMBUS, OH – The 2006 Lake Erie Awards were presented today to Cuyahoga River protectionist James White and to the Maritime Archaeological Survey Team, Inc. (MAST). Sam Speck, chairman of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission and director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources made the presentation, which is given annually to an individual and organization that has demonstrated exceptional stewardship of Lake Erie. Accepting the award for MAST were Michael Wachter, past-president, and Georgann Wachter, treasurer.

“Protection of Lake Erie’s natural and cultural features requires local volunteers. The commitment of people such as Jim White and of the many volunteers with the Maritime Archeological Survey Team is essential to our effort to protect and restore both Lake Erie’s environment and economy,” Speck said.

James White is executive director of the Cuyahoga River Community Planning Organization. In that role, he coordinates local efforts to restore the Cuyahoga River, which has been designated by the International Joint Commission as an Area of Concern. That designation triggered the development of a Remedial Action Plan, a strategy for public and private sector partners to work toward correcting impairments in the river. Through the U.S. EPA’s American Heritage River program, White serves as “River Navigator” for the Cuyahoga River. Additionally, he created the Cuyahoga-Lake Erie Environmental Restoration Technology Enterprise Center to merge needs of environmental restoration with innovative environmental technology and economic development. This effort has attracted \$1.8 million in federal funds to replace aging sheet steel bulkheads along the Cuyahoga River ship channel with an environmentally friendly, cost-effective alternative.

“Jim takes a regional view of Lake Erie restoration that is very refreshing,” Speck said. “Although his work is primarily on the Cuyahoga River, he understands that all major tributaries must be restored in order for Lake Erie to fully recover. Therefore, he is an advocate for long-term, sustainable watershed management programs throughout the Lake Erie basin and indeed the entire Great Lakes region. He goes well beyond his area of responsibility to link together the larger community of Great Lakes stakeholders.”

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“In addition, Jim understands that the environmental benefits of restoring Lake Erie must be coupled with economic benefits for North Coast communities and Ohio as a whole. He is quick to seek cutting-edge technology that will bolster the economy while improving conditions in the Cuyahoga River,” Speck stated.

The Maritime Archaeological Survey Team is a volunteer group with more than 200 members, mostly Ohioans, dedicated to preserving the submerged cultural history of Lake Erie. The group has surveyed five Lake Erie shipwrecks and has placed the first six mooring buoys at Ohio shipwreck sites. Their efforts have increased preservation of shipwrecks, contributed to diver safety and increased tourist visits to Ohio’s North Coast.

Speck pointed out that MAST is actively involved in providing educational courses to the public about Ohio’s shipwrecks. “As the shallowest of the Great Lakes, Lake Erie has a reputation for fierce storms over the open water, which, at one time, caused many ships to be lost. Fortunately, thanks to modern storm-tracking technology, ships’ captains can receive advanced warning of approaching foul weather. Today, Ohio’s Lake Erie shipwrecks have become a fascinating part of our submerged cultural history, and MAST is helping Ohioans understand more about them.”

“As interest in these shipwrecks increases, it’s important that they be preserved so that their value as a tourism venue won’t be eroded by scavenging. We recognize MAST’s efforts in this area as well,” Speck noted.

The Lake Erie Awards were presented at the 2006 Lake Erie Conference, held at Lorain Community College. The conference also featured the release of the Ohio Lake Erie Action List, steps that state agencies will take over the next two years to protect the lake, and presentations by scientists whose research has been funded by the Lake Erie Protection Fund. The fund is supported by revenues from the sale of Lake Erie license plates.

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