

OHIO COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
ISSUE AREA: FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Uses Subject to Management

- Activities involving the taking of fish and wildlife.
- Activities affecting the fish and wildlife habitat areas.
- Activities that affect the management of fish and wildlife.

Fish and Habitat Management

The history of Lake Erie fisheries has included human-induced changes in both the extent and variety of lake habitats. Generally, the populations and diversity of sport and commercial fish species have declined in conjunction with loss of habitat loss and degradation. Those habitats most greatly reduced in size include deep, oxygenated cold water areas, vegetated areas, clean bottom sand and gravel areas, estuaries, and wetlands used for spawning, feeding, migration, and refuge.

Increased sedimentation from past and present land use, higher nutrient levels in Lake Erie from point and nonpoint pollution sources, dredging and filling activities, and chemical and thermal pollution all have had their impacts.

Lake Erie's varied aquatic ecosystems, including nearshore waters, bays and estuaries, offshore shoal areas, and deep water, all provide important fish habitat. Specifically, there are five habitat areas of critical concern: Maumee Bay, the Toussaint-Locust Point reef complex, the Islands area, the Ruggles reef complex, and Sandusky Bay (including Muddy Creek Bay). Protection of these habitat areas is an important objective of the OCMP. A few remaining coastal coldwater streams east of Cleveland offer important seasonal habitat for salmonids because they are the closest suitable habitat near summer feeding areas of Lake Erie. These species are adapted to the colder water temperatures provided by such streams, and thus it is important that such habitat is not degraded or warmed.

International committees and work groups of the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission, the Lake Erie Committee, the Walleye Task Group, the Yellow Perch Task Group, the Forage Task Group and the Standing Technical Committee have reached a consensus regarding necessary scientific needs and a management approach for Lake Erie. Funds available through the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program 16 U.S.C. 777 have been used primarily for research, development of access sites, fish hatchery renovations and land acquisition. Through the Council of Great Lakes Governors, the four Lake Erie states and Ontario are continuing efforts to develop a coordinated fish advisory for Lake Erie. Such improved coordination and unified management practices will continue to improve these valuable fisheries.

Wildlife and Habitat Management

Human activities in the Lake Erie basin have dramatically reduced wildlife habitat in the coastal area. This habitat loss is the major reason for an overall reduction in Ohio's coastal wildlife population. Most of the original Lake Erie wetlands and swamp forests have been drained, filled, cut or paved over for various purposes. High water and erosion have caused an additional loss of shoreline wetlands.

Wildlife habitat areas that remain relatively undisturbed still face an array of threats including air and water pollution, soil erosion and siltation. Poor water quality is a particularly serious problem that helps explain why aquatic animals make up a large portion of Ohio's endangered species. Loss of habitat and degraded environmental quality has harmed migratory waterfowl, for which the Great Lakes serve as an important link between Canada and southern destinations. In particular, marshes of the western Lake Erie basin are known as significant migration resting areas as well as sites of excellent waterfowl hunting. These marshlands extend from Sandusky to Toledo and contain approximately 22,700 acres of waterfowl habitat, a large portion of which is actual wetlands. Most of this habitat is owned by the state or federal government and private hunting clubs. The Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge alone encompasses roughly 8,300 acres of waterfowl habitat. ODNR, Division of Wildlife, maintains approximately 4,500 acres of western basin wetlands located within seven western Lake Erie wildlife areas. Private hunting clubs manage an additional 8,000 acres of habitat.