



Photo: Art Weber



Linking Tourism & Resource Conservation

**2007 Annual Report
Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail and the
OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program Office**

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Greetings from Lake Erie

A Toledo friend recently attended a business conference along the Mississippi River. During a break in activities, she wandered out to a patio overlooking the river. A few minutes later, a picturesque riverboat floated past. “Wow! That’s awesome!” she exclaimed to a gentleman standing next to her. He said, “You think that’s amazing? Have you ever visited Toledo, Ohio, and seen the freighters come in off Lake Erie? Now that’s an awesome sight.”

How often do we underestimate and ignore those features of our region that define who we are — our natural areas, historical sites, and cultural stories? Without these unique features, would we not be a pretty homogenous nation, with no differentiating characteristics to attract new jobs, residents, and businesses?

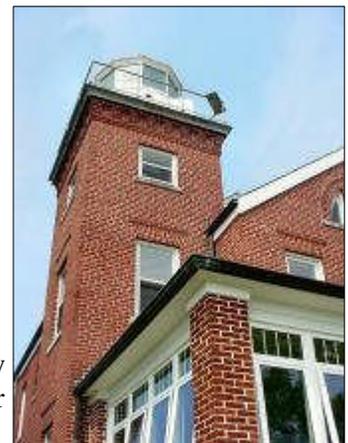
The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration and The Brookings Institute understand the linkage between protecting our resources and our ability to enhance economic development. Both have issued reports calling for an approach to enhance the image of the Great Lakes region as one tool for enhancing the environmental vitality of these precious freshwater resources. The region’s tourism industry is a natural partner in this approach. Tourism, in its most traditional role, is the existing vehicle for marketing a region, so let’s cooperate and leverage their skills and resources.

Along Lake Erie, our coastal visitors bureaus understand the connection between promoting and protecting the resources that attract guests. The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail is the mechanism by which we have built a sustainable tourism program for our state’s shoreline. Joining us as partners in this effort in late-2006 are the Ohio Sea Grant Program and The Ohio State University Extension. These programs recognize the need to extend outreach and education to build more livable communities and attract investors in our communities.

Tourism is one of the largest industries in northern Ohio, generating more than \$8.7 billion in direct spending and employing more than 146,000 Ohioans. It’s an industry that also generates more than \$480 million in local and state sales tax revenue, funds used to support other programs in our communities and within the state. Leading the way in reasons why visitors select a destination are features related to a region’s heritage, culture, and landscape. These experiences, however, are often managed by nonprofits or agencies that do not have a tourism mission. They do, however, benefit greatly by demonstrating their economic value within a community.

As one of 126 national scenic byways designated by the Federal Highway Administration, the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail has a commitment to preserve those features that make us unique, that define who we are, and that should be promoted in a responsible way to create this linkage. Our goals are bold, but our mission deserves nothing less. By working together with community leaders, resource managers, statewide and national leaders, and tourism professionals, we invite you to “Come Closer, and experience Lake Erie.”

Melinda Huntley
OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program Director



Tourism and Resource Conservation as Partners in Creating a Livable Community

Established as a national scenic byway in October 2005 by the Federal Highway Administration, the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail addresses two distinct goals within its mission: 1.) promoting and protecting the intrinsic resources of Lake Erie and 2.) enhancing the economic impact of tourism.

At first glance, these goals seem unrelated, and some might even say, at odds with one another. By addressing potential conflicting issues upfront, however, the synergy between these two goals creates opportunities for cooperation, powerful creative ideas that are the result of people from various backgrounds gathering to discuss common issues.

The following selected 2007 accomplishments are directly linked to specific visions defined by the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail board and the more than 1,500 stakeholders who participated in the public planning components of developing our master plan.

New products and methods are created to enhance economic development through increased visitor spending

The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program office connects resources to encourage economic improvements due to visitor spending:

- More than 1,500 individuals have requested a copy of “Lake Erie Lighthouses and Maritime Adventures” publication, and another 80,000 copies of this publication have been distributed through visitors bureaus, travel information centers, travel shows, and maritime attractions. In addition, coastal visitors bureaus have adapted this itinerary to encourage group visits and are using it as a sales piece. The publication links 31 lighthouses, maritime museums and museum ships to encourage longer lengths of stays, attract new visitors, and support a network of maritime resource managers. The publication was awarded a Toledo Addys “Honorable Mention” award in 2007.
- More than 35,000 visitors have learned more about the Lake Erie region through a new web site at www.coastalohio.com that links 380 historic sites, natural areas, and cultural attractions along Lake Erie. Site includes interactive mapping, information about the development and cultural contributions of Lake Erie, real-time bird sightings and news, events, and a way to search by interests.
- Identified 60 birding hot spots along Lake Erie and coordinated a meeting of birding experts and resource managers to enhance the promotion of birding along the shoreline. A new web site and map to birding hot spots will be produced in 2008.
- More than 200 bicyclists spent a week touring lighthouses and communities along Lake Erie during an XOBA Lake Erie Lighthouse bike tour, July 19-24.

The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program Office increases awareness of Lake Erie and its historical, natural and cultural resources:

- More than 1.2 million people have the potential to be reached with messages showcasing the beauty and heritage of Lake Erie through display ads promoting the resources of Lake Erie. These were placed in *Discover Ohio*, the Ohio Calendar of Events, *Long Weekends*, and *Ohio Magazine*.
- A WKYC-TV 3 documentary, “Lake Erie: Beyond the Surface” expanded to four television specials based on information provided from the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail’s interpretive framework. More than 1.4 million viewers are reached with this documentary. It is also available online.
- 5,263 individuals have read postings on the tourism section of the Ohio Sea Grant Lake Erie Discussion Board accessible from www.coastalohio.com.

- Web visitors found new information routinely at www.coastalohio.com through postings of more than 2,700 festivals and events, 227 Recent Sightings birding reports and more than 17 News reports in 2007.
- More than 1.95 million people reached with editorial stories about the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail, including the following: -- The History Channel: Ohio and The History Channel: Pennsylvania (Lake Erie), *Sandusky Register* (OTA Presidency), *North Coast Business Journal* (OTA Presidency), *Port Clinton News Herald* (OTA Presidency), Ohio Highway Map, *Home and Away* magazine, *Port Clinton News Herald* (LECO), Northcoast Television (LECO), *Ohio Magazine* (birding), *Sandusky Register* (tourism funding), Sandusky City Commission meeting local access broadcast (Water Trail and Resource-based Tourism), *Port Clinton News Herald* (tourism funding), *Sandusky Register* (LECO), *Ohio Magazine* (heritage sites), *Great Lakes Boating* (beaches), WKSU Radio, *Country Living* (two LECO features.)
- WGTE TV Toledo continues to air “Lake Erie: Our Great Lake” hour-long documentary about the importance and heritage of Lake Erie. Additional exposure is created by other markets picking up this program.
- Footage shot by Lake Erie Coastal Ohio used by The History Channel for two different programs highlighting Great Lakes states, the National Scenic Byway Program in promotional efforts, and a Great Lakes cruising coalition.
- The National Scenic Byway Program featured the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension efforts in working with the WKYC TV-3 documentary in a national newsletter to byway community stakeholders and federal officials.
- Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension represented at “Meet the Editor” event coordinated by the Ohio Travel Association.
- Contributed Lake Erie photographs and information to regional health care facility developing a physician recruitment piece.

Through designation as one of America’s 126 national scenic byways, continue to leverage additional awareness and look for opportunities for increasing awareness of the region:

- Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail featured in *National Geographic’s* “Highways and Byways” travel guide series.
- All Ohio Department of Transportation official highway maps include the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail, providing travelers with an alternative to interstate travel and connecting travels to more information about our region.
- A new web feature highlights birding opportunities along the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail thru a U.S. Fish & Wildlife initiative, Byways and Birding.
- In 2007, more than 52,000 unique visitors explored the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail on its web site created through the National Scenic Byway program at www.byways.org.

Continue to educate policymakers about the important role of tourism and resource conservation in economic development for the State of Ohio:

- State of Ohio tourism funding increased 40-percent to the highest level in state history. Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Executive Director/OSU Sea Grant Tourism Program Director Melinda Huntley led the Ohio Travel Association as President in 2006-07 and participated in development of a summary evaluating the potential effects on tax

revenues if Ohio Division of Travel and Tourism was funded to a competitive level. This participation also included coordinating outreach efforts to industry members and the General Assembly, as well as unifying the four major tourism organizations in the state.

- As the Ohio Travel Association President, Melinda Huntley participated in industry leadership roundtables with key state tourism leadership.
- Approximately 180 members of the General Assembly and their guests learned more about Lake Erie, its resources, and the economic importance of tourism during a 2-day event in which the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension provided coordinating assistance and presentations.
- Members of the Ohio General Assembly and their staff learned more about the importance of tourism to the state's economy during an industry-wide Hospitality Legislative Day. Melinda Huntley served on the coordinating committee for this event.
- Participated in Fish Ohio Day.
- The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program assisted state conservation leaders and others in providing tourism economic impact information related to the pending Great Lakes Compact legislation.
- The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program provided input and guidance to tourism industry leaders regarding post-Labor Day school start issue.
- Toledo elected officials learned more about the economic importance of historic preservation, natural area conservation and Lake Erie through a presentation by Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur. Congresswoman Kaptur requested talking points and information sheets from the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio/OSU Sea Grant Extension office that she could distribute at this event.

More people are aware of the importance of resource conservation and tourism's role in economic development

Educate business leaders, decision makers, coastal residents, and other stakeholders about the importance of tourism and resource conservation to the economic vitality and potential of the Lake Erie region:

- Twelve emerging leaders learned about the importance of regionalism, resource protection, and tourism through a presentation for the Cleveland Executive Fellowship, a leadership development program for Cleveland area professionals.
- More than 1,267 planners, business leaders, decision makers and coastal residents learned more about the value of tourism and resource conservation and their impact on economic development during presentations to NOAA National Estuarine Research Reserve Conference, Ohio Preservation Conference, Cuyahoga County Board of Health, Lake Erie Marine Trades Association, District Power Squadron, Lakeside Board of Trustees, City of Toledo Neighborhood Forum, Port Clinton Rotary Club, Erie MetroParks Commissioners, Huron Rotary, Sandusky Power Squadron, the Western Lake Erie Basin Conference, Erie County Democratic Women's Association, and more.
- Thirty-five (35) Cleveland developers and planners informed about tourism needs and its relationship with conservation of the resources through a presentation and panel discussion hosted by the Cuyahoga Valley Initiative. The Cuyahoga Planning Commission has developed a plan to revitalize the Cuyahoga Valley. M. Huntley participated in the initial committee to address tourism and preservation issues.

- Approximately 200 hospitality industry leaders learned more about the issues facing Ohio tourism through a Hospitality Legislative Day. These tourism industry officials attended initial training session then met with local policymakers. This event was the first time a coordinated effort occurred between the top tourism industry associations in the state. Huntley served on the planning committee through her role as 2006-07 president of the Ohio Travel Association.
- More than 2,600 stakeholders reached through electronic info@coastalohio newsletter.
- Lake Erie Coastal Ohio/OSU Sea Grant Extension had the opportunity to provide input and ideas as a member of the Ohio Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan created by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources in 2007 and printed in spring 2008.
- Cleveland Metroparks individual distributes information and links from the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio newsletter to his entire staff of 61. The newsletter goes to 850 individuals several times quarterly.
- The Lake Erie Coastal Atlas developed by the ODNR Coastal Management Office includes editorial created by the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program office.

The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Program supports research, education and outreach efforts that enhance our understanding and ability to implement resource-based tourism strategies:

- Assisted Cleveland State University masters candidate with information related to nature-based tourism.
- Assisted Case Western Reserve University with information related to the potential economic benefits of Dike 14 Nature Preserve in Cleveland.
- Coordinated strategic planning session for natural areas managers in the Western Basin area to identify challenges and opportunities for promoting birding-related activities.
- Served as co-leader for a newly-formed OSU Extension Tourism Team linking academic community with tourism industry through new programs and products.

The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail provided research-based support, education, and guidance in the preservation and conservation of Lake Erie's resources:

- The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program has helped secure a minimum of \$4.8 million for protection and restoration projects, such as natural area acquisition, lighthouse preservation, and enhancement of educational and interpretive displays.
- At a time when 68% of American travelers are seeking outdoor recreational experiences, the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio areas are focusing more on the visitor experience. More than 19 natural site managers received assistance in creating a better experience, while also receiving information on protecting the resources from increased use.
- Provided economic impact information to Ohio Environmental Council for information relating to the Western Basin Partnership.

Historical, natural, and cultural resources along Lake Erie are protected

- Participated in discussions relating to the impact of climate change to the tourism industry. Surveyed coastal tourism industry members regarding forecasting needs, and assisted in communicating information about a Toledo pilot testing grant application.

OSU Sea Grant Extension encourages sustainable marina and boating activity to enhance the environmental integrity of Lake Erie:

- Nearly 400,000 pounds of boat shrink-wrap and 1,560,000 pounds of greenhouse plastics have been recycled since this program launched. Gary Comer and Dave Kelch coordinate a Clean Marina Program involving more than 26 certified marinas and 22 pledged marinas. In addition, 522 boaters met requirements for Ohio Clean Boater Program .

New experiences are available for those seeking to explore Lake Erie's natural and historical stories

The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program provided guidance, education and support in developing new experiences for the resource-based traveler.

- Assisted City of Conneaut and Conneaut Port Authority with support information for development of a shoreline boardwalk to protect and enhance a prime birding and light-house-viewing area. This grant application is the result of a field trip and planning session with city and county officials to demonstrate the value of this natural and scenic area.
- The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program encouraged public access and the development of sustainable activities through opening of East Sandusky Bay Water Trail. By communicating the economic importance of our resources, the potential for new economic spending, and the experiential needs of travelers, assisted with the creation of the East Sandusky Bay Water Trail. This 15-mile water trail is sponsored by the City of Sandusky and Erie MetroParks and is the first non-motorized water trail developed on Lake Erie.
- Twenty-eight beach managers learned more about importance of providing good recreational experiences, as well as the economic importance of these areas, during a presentation that was part of a beach manager forum sponsored by the Cuyahoga Health Department.
- South Bass Island Lighthouse and Gibraltar Island Eco-tours are now available, thanks to the efforts of John Hageman from OSU Sea Grant.
- The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension office contributed to planning process of NASA Plum Brook property in Sandusky.
- The National Park Service contacted the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program for information related to extended-stay learning experiences for travelers.
- Travelers find a signed route along Lake Erie thanks to completion of signage for the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail in late-2007.

The Lake Erie region is a leader in promoting sustainable tourism within the Great Lakes and through the America's Byways ® network.

The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program is an active participant in the America's Byways program and provides leadership and ideas for continued growth of this Federal Highway Administration program:

- M. Huntley selected to serve as the chairman of a steering committee developing a tool for measuring the economic impact of byway designation.

- M. Huntley re-elected to serve as a board member for the National Scenic Byway Foundation.
- Contributed toward a more than 57% response rate on a survey of byway leaders across the United States by coordinating follow-up activities, and coordinated a meeting of the National Scenic Byway Economic Impact Study Steering Committee. This committee is evaluating the ability to develop a tool to be used by national scenic byways to evaluate the impact of byway designation. The initial focus will be tourism participation, as well as the investment in historical and natural preservation.
- Drafted overall business and strategic plan for the National Scenic Byway Foundation that emphasized tangible benefits for byways who are members of the foundation. Presented to the National Scenic Byway Foundation. The foundation has informally adopted the plan and is following through with the recommendations.
- Ohio byway leaders learned more about the needs of the tourism industry during a presentation to Ohio Byways Links association.
- Upon request, M. Huntley contributed economic impact article to the National Scenic Byway newsletter, "Vistas."

The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension Tourism Program pursues development of a Great Lakes tourism initiative that promotes sustainable tourism in the Great Lakes and enhances the Great Lakes image:

- Great Lakes Sea Grant agents learned more about the importance of image in resource stewardship during a presentation to identify opportunities for coordinating outreach and tourism efforts along the Great Lakes.
- Nearly 100 stakeholders in Toronto learned about the importance of image in resource stewardship during a presentation to the Toronto Waterfront Regeneration trust annual meeting, where they discussed Great Lakes partnerships.
- Eight Great Lakes state tourism directors contacted for support in working together to develop a strategy for enhancing the image of the Great Lakes. Michigan and Ohio tourism directors played key roles and are interested in pursuing this initiative.
- The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail/OSU Sea Grant Extension office developed a proposal for creating a Great Lakes tourism initiative to leverage state marketing efforts to promote an enhanced image of the Great Lakes and their value to America.