



What can we do to protect our Great Lakes?

The Great Lakes are one of the natural wonders of the world, a resource for us to use and protect. The Great Lakes Basin contains 95% of the nation's fresh surface water and supplies drinking water for the 33 million people who live within its watersheds. The area is a unique environment, containing forest, wetland, marsh, and dune communities and sustaining over 3,500 species of plants and animals.

Threatened and endangered species located within the basin include trilliums, dwarf lake irises, picture plants, bald eagles, and piping plovers. The Lakes are the only freshwater system of their kind in size and ecological diversity and are essential to humans and wildlife alike, providing homes, food, recreation, and economic sustainability.

Lakes Erie's critical position

Lake Erie, Ohio's Great Lake, is vitally important to Ohio's environment and economy. It is an important resource for Ohio's residents, industries, agriculture, municipalities, and ecosystems making its 312 miles of shoreline a great source of wealth and vitality for residents and visitors.

The lake supplies drinking water to roughly 3 million Ohioans and supports more than a quarter of a million jobs, netting more than \$5.8 billion in wages each year. It is the shallowest, warmest, and most biologically productive of all the Great Lakes and produces more fish for human consumption than all the other four Great Lakes combined. Lake Erie underpins a \$1 billion sport fishing industry, and its shoreline contributes another \$9.45 billion a year in tourism and travel revenue to the Ohio economy. Lake Erie is certainly a resource worth protecting and improving.



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Challenges facing our Great Lake

- Build-up of toxic pollutants that make waters unsafe for swimming, fish unsafe for eating, and habitats unfit for wildlife
- Reemergence of the Lake Erie Dead Zone, an area of depleted oxygen that prevents aerobic organisms such as fish from living there. An increase in phosphorous levels, falling water levels, warmer water, and invasive species are all exacerbating this problem.
- Combined sewer overflows that dump raw, untreated human waste into our waterways. During the 2005 swimming season, sewage overflows caused 182 beach advisories along Lake Erie's beaches.
- The introduction of non-native species such as the zebra and quagga mussels that threaten to destroy the Great Lakes' diversity and food web.
- Destruction of irreplaceable coastal habitats and wetlands that are critical to the survival of Great Lakes' plants and animals. Ohio has already lost 90% of its wetlands.



Demand Great Lakes restoration

We must press for action on many fronts, both to promote the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and to stop measures that harm them. Currently opportunities to improve the lakes include federal legislation for Great Lakes restoration funding and controlling invasive species. The most harmful measures which must be stopped include recent EPA proposals to allow more contamination to enter the lakes through air and water pollution.

The time is now to demand Great Lakes restoration and protection. Members of Congress from both political parties have sponsored the Great Lakes Collaboration Implementation Act of 2007 (S. 791/H.R. 1350) that would provide billions of dollars to address the worst impairments of the lakes in an effective way. Congress will then consider whether to make such restoration funding a priority. Although we will need to do much more to fully restore the Great Lakes to their greatness, such funding is a huge and necessary step in preserving nature's gift.

The Ohio Environmental Council is working closely with other organizations throughout Ohio and across the Great Lakes Basin to push for large scale, federally funded restoration efforts to address the threats currently facing the Great Lakes. The OEC is asking members of Congress to re-introduce and provide necessary funding for the Great Lakes Collaboration Implementation Act, making a long term commitment to the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes.

The OEC has been working to:

1. increase the visibility of Great Lakes restoration throughout Ohio
2. enlist more sponsorship from Ohio's Congressional delegation
3. push for authorization of the legislation and the appropriation of necessary funding to begin Great Lakes restoration
4. ensure that the public is involved in Great Lakes restoration efforts

What you can do to help

It is imperative that your voice be heard. Please contact your federal and state legislators (visit <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/home/> to find out who your legislators are) to show your support for Great Lakes restoration, including fully funding the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Restoration Plan, as well as implementing the policies outlined in the plan.

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"I urge Congress to quickly implement the Great Lakes Collaboration Implementation Act. The Great Lakes are a one-of-a-kind, ecologically rich, national treasure. They are the foundation of health, economic vitality, and recreation for millions of Americans. We can and must work together to protect and restore this natural wonder, an important asset to all Americans, so that our children and grandchildren can experience the lakes as we have."

- Governor Strickland of Ohio

"Restoring the greatness of the Great Lakes requires that governments at all levels work together on a fundamental restoration agenda - making sure beaches are safe for swimming, fish are safe for eating and water is safe for drinking. There must also be bi-national action to close the door to invasive species to keep the door open for commerce. A commitment to restoring the Great Lakes would be good news for anglers, hunters, boaters and everyone who drinks the water and depends on the lakes for jobs and recreation."

- Dennis Schornack
U.S. Section Chair, IJC