

# F A C T S H E E T



## Great Lakes Restoration Overview

The Great Lakes are one of the natural wonders of the world and are a resource for us to use and protect. The Great Lakes Basin contains 95 percent of the nation's fresh surface water and supplies drinking water for the 33 million people who live within its' watersheds. It 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. It is the only freshwater system of its kind in size and ecological diversity and is essential to humans and wildlife alike; providing homes, food, recreation, and economic sustainability.

Lake Erie, Ohio's Great Lake, is vitally important to Ohio's environment and economy. Ohio's 262 miles of Lake Erie shoreline is a great source of wealth and vitality for its residents and visitors. Lake Erie is an important resource for Ohio's residents, industries, agriculture, municipalities, and ecosystems. The lake supplies drinking water to 11 million people, 3 million of whom live in Ohio. It supports the largest sport fishery in the Great Lakes and one of the largest freshwater commercial fisheries in the world, earning the fishing industry more than \$1 billion a year. The Lake Erie shoreline contributes another \$2.5 billion a year in travel revenue to the Ohio economy – a third of all travel revenue in the state. Ohio's Lake Erie shoreline is certainly a resource worth protecting and improving.

Unfortunately, Lake Erie is facing many challenges including:

- The build up of toxic pollutants that make waters unsafe for swimming, fish unsafe for eating, and habitats unfit for wildlife
- The reemergence of the Lake Erie Dead Zone, an area of depleted oxygen that prevent aerobic organisms such as fish from living there. An increase in phosphorous levels, falling water levels, warmer water, and invasive zebra and quagga mussels are all exacerbating this problem.
- Combined sewer overflows that dump raw, untreated human waste into our waterways. During the 2003 swimming season, sewage overflows caused 413 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 our wetlands.

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 a Great Lakes restoration funding initiative and legislation to control the introduction of invasive species. The measures most harmful to the lakes that we need to stop include recent EPA proposals to allow more contamination to enter the lakes through air and water pollution.

1207 GRANDVIEW AVE.  
SUITE 201  
COLUMBUS, OHIO  
43212-3449

VOICE  
(614) 487-7506

FAX  
(614) 487-7510

EMAIL  
oec@theOEC.org

[www.theOEC.org](http://www.theOEC.org)

Printed on recycled paper.  
Please recycle.

The time is now to demand Great Lakes restoration and protection. Members of Congress from both political parties have sponsored bills in the House (H.R. 792 "Great Lakes Restoration Financing Act of 2005") and Senate (S. 508 "Great Lakes Environmental Restoration Act") that would provide billions of dollars to address the worst impairments of the lakes in an effective way. President Bush is now considering whether to make such restoration funding a priority for his Administration. 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 and President Bush to provide necessary funding for the Great Lakes Environmental Restoration Act and to make 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 legislators, 3) push for authorization of the legislation and the appropriation of necessary funding to begin Great Lakes Restoration, and 4) ensure that the public is involved in Great Lakes Restoration efforts.

**For more information contact:**

Kristy Meyer, Outreach Coordinator  
Ohio Environmental Council  
1207 Grandview Ave. Suite 201  
Columbus, OH 43212  
P: 614-487-7506  
F: 614-487-7510  
E-mail: [Kristy@theOEC.org](mailto:Kristy@theOEC.org)