

# Lake Erie Commission

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## Overview

The Lake Erie Commission (LEC) is responsible for coordinating state policies and programs that are related to Lake Erie and its surrounding areas. LEC's role is to preserve Lake Erie's natural resources, protect the quality of its waters and ecosystem, and promote the development of the north coast. The Commission comprises the directors of the Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Transportation, Department of Agriculture, Department of Development, and Department of Health. The Commission established the Lake Erie Office, located in Toledo, to implement its duties required under Revised Code sections 1506.21 through 1506.24.

LEC began as an Ohio Water Development Authority grant administered through the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). LEC's operating expenses originate from the Lake Erie Protection Fund (LEPF), which largely consist of revenue from the sale of the Lake Erie license plate and moneys awarded to the state from the Great Lakes Protection Fund (GLPF).

The Great Lakes Protection Fund is a regional endowment fund in which states, contiguous to the Great Lakes, deposit money to fund projects and programs related to the Great Lakes. One-third of the annual earnings of the fund is transferred to the states. Ohio's portion is placed into the LEPF.

The Lake Erie Office consists of the Executive Director, an Executive Secretary, a Public Information Specialist, a Fiscal Specialist, a part-time Secretary, and a part-time college Intern. An Environmental Specialist will be hired in FY 2001.

The Office performs the following activities: advises the Governor and the Commission on the development, coordination, and implementation of Lake Erie programs; represents Ohio in regional, national and international forums relating to the Great Lakes; assists in the Coastal Zone Management program; facilitates compliance with the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and Great Lakes Toxic Substances Control Agreement; and manages the distribution of funds from the LEPF. Specifically, LEC has developed a strategic plan, the Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan, to guide its efforts in the upcoming biennium and beyond.

ADDITIONAL FACTS AND FIGURES

Lake Erie Commission Staffing Levels						
Program Series/Division	1998	1999	2000	2001	Estimated	
					2002	2003
Executive Director	1	1	1	1	1	1
Executive Secretary	1	1	1	1	1	1
Environmental Specialist	0	0	0	1	1	1
College Intern	1.5	1	.5	.5	.5	.5
Secretary	.5	.5	.5	.5	.5	.5
Public Information Specialist	1	1	1	1	1	1
Fiscal Specialist	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>

The Lake Erie Office consists of five full-time and two part-time staff: the Executive Director; an Executive Secretary; a Public Information Specialist; a Fiscal Specialist; a part-time Secretary; an Administrative Assistant, an Environmental Specialist to be hired in FY 2001, and a part-time college Intern. The part-time Secretary is funded through the USDA to provide support for the resident Great Lakes Coordinator of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

**COASTWEEKS**

The Lake Erie Commission sponsors an annual public outreach program, Coastweeks, to promote the preservation and protection of Lake Erie. This program takes place all along the Lake Erie shore and features volunteer clean-up activities, as well as exhibits of materials related to Lake Erie conservation and development. Over 100 Coastweeks events have taken place in the current biennium with 28,320 pounds of debris being removed by 1,150 volunteers. Two annual conferences were conducted and over 400 citizens attended the conferences.

**Coastweeks 2000 Projects (As of November 2000)**

Name of Cleanup	# of Participants	Weight in Pounds	Distance in Miles
Put-in-Bay	172	1,044	0.30
Maumee Bay	16	40	5
USS Cod	50	42	0.20
Sheldon Marsh	10	500	1
East Harbor	4	30	3
Aqua Amigos	20	180	0.25
Arcola Creek	12	120	0.10
Clean Your Streams	106	4,800	Unknown
<b>GRAND TOTALS</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>6,756 lbs.</b>	<b>14.35 miles</b>

## ANALYSIS OF EXECUTIVE PROPOSAL

### LAKE ERIE COMMISSION

### Single Program Agency

**Purpose** The Lake Erie Commission (LEC) is responsible for coordinating the state policies and programs that are related to Lake Erie and its surrounding areas. LEC’s role is to preserve Lake Erie’s natural resources, protect the quality of its waters and ecosystem, and promote the development of the North Coast.

The following table shows the line items that are used to fund the Lake Erie Commission, as well as the Governor’s recommended funding levels.

Fund	ALI	Title	FY 2002	FY 2003
4C0	780-601	Lake Erie Protection Fund	\$1,044,854	\$1,070,975
5D8	780-602	Lake Erie Resources Fund	\$661,009	\$689,004
<b>Total funding: Lake Erie Commission</b>			<b>\$1,705,863</b>	<b>\$1,759,979</b>

### OHIO LAKE ERIE COMMISSION

**Program Description:** The Lake Erie Commission works to protect Lake Erie’s natural resources, restore degraded elements of the Lake Erie ecosystem, and promote economic development of Ohio’s north coast. The Commission also oversees the management of the Lake Erie Protection Fund, which was established to protect and enhance Lake Erie through research, restoration, and education. Members of the Commission include the director of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and the directors of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio Department of Health, Ohio Department of Transportation, Ohio Department of Development, and Ohio Department of Agriculture. Authority for the Lake Erie Commission is given under Ohio Revised Code Sections 1506.21, 1506.23 and 4503.53. The Commission was established in 1990.

**Lake Erie Grants:** The Lake Erie Commission selects grant recipients through a competitive process. The Commission has a small grant cycle for research projects, and a large grant cycle for implementation projects. Once the applications are received, they go through a review process that includes both outside researchers and state agency people to determine the viability and applicability of each of the grant proposals. The LEC Grants Committee (made up of a designee from each of the Commission Agencies) does a final review prior to approval by the Commission. Proposals are reviewed and judged according to technical quality, their relevance to the Commission’s stated goals, and the degree to which the proposal will result in real improvements to the Lake Erie watershed. Examples of typical projects include the restoration of wetlands or habitat; ecology research; monitoring of manufacturing and/or chemical plants; and the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs). The grants are only awarded to private organizations, nonprofit organizations, academic groups, or state/local government agencies. The grant is applicable for up to three years and a ten percent match is required. During the 1999-2001 biennium approximately 35 grants will have been awarded, worth \$1.5 million.

During the next biennium the Lake Erie Office anticipates awarding 65 grants. The grantees will prepare projects involving research and implementation in the priority areas of pollution

prevention, habitat restoration, and exotic species prevention. A program will be established to assess the effectiveness of the grants program.

**Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan:** A priority during the next biennium will be to implement the objectives of the Commission's strategic plan, the Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan. This report was released in September 2000 and includes 84 actions that promote the environmental, recreational, and economic resources of Lake Erie and its watershed. The 84 actions are categorized into broader initiatives, as follows:

- ✦ Establish the Governor's Balanced Growth Blue Ribbon Task Force to develop recommendations for Lake Erie conservation;
- ✦ Designate other awards for sound environmental or development practices;
- ✦ Create and publish a *Lake Erie Model Zoning Ordinance* and *Building Code*;
- ✦ Establish a program to promote cultural and ecological tourism in partnership with local tourism bureaus;
- ✦ Provide for buffers on 80% of Lake Erie watershed ditches, streams, and tributaries;
- ✦ Develop a Lake Erie educational program for middle schools.

For the upcoming biennium, activities will include establishing an Ohio Lake Erie Heritage Area Taskforce and a comprehensive Ohio Lake Erie Monitoring Plan to gauge the health of the watershed. Action coordinators will seek to develop a Lake Erie radio consortium to feature weekly spots about the Great Lakes.

The Lake Erie Coastal Resources Inventory and Lake Erie Quality Index will be updated. These documents are used to examine the status and quality of Lake Erie resources.

**Lake Erie License Plates:** A continuing challenge for the Commission is to generate enough revenues to maintain operations and the grants program. Revenues from the Lake Erie license plates has decreased from a high of \$912,210 in FY 1997 to \$781,000 in FY 2000, due to increased competition in specialty license plates. Overall, the license plate revenues are declining at a rate of 5% annually.

To help cover grants, excess moneys from the Lake Erie Resources funds are requested for transfer to the Lake Erie Protection Fund (see Permanent and Temporary law section). Although this measure will help fund some grants, it clearly does not address concerns of insufficient revenues for operations. In addition, this gap measure may not address the long-term problem of decreasing revenues for license plates. Since specialty license plate purchases appear to be partially driven by the state of the economy, revenues may increase as the economy strengthens. The Commission's research has found that the Lake Erie license plate customers are loyal and earn incomes high enough not to be as affected by economic downturns. This optimism is augmented by the fact that the Lake Erie Resources Fund produces an average \$250,000 surplus each year. However, in future budgets, such transfers from the Lake Erie Resources Fund should be reexamined to assess the long-term benefits to the Lake Erie Protection Fund.

In FY 1999, the Lake Erie Office commissioned a comprehensive marketing research evaluation of its revenue-generating programs. Following findings of the evaluation, in the next biennium the Commission intends to raise \$10 million towards a Lake Erie Protection Fund Endowment. In addition, the Lake Erie Office will pursue new License Plates initiatives, as well as a marketing campaign, aimed at reversing the decreasing sales trends.

The Lake Erie Commission is planning to introduce three new plate designs, including lighthouses, in the new biennium. The Commission is also considering releasing a cooperative plate with the Department of Natural Resources; revenues would benefit both agencies.

The Commission has developed a biennial Customer Report postcard is sent to the Lake Erie Commission customers to inform them of the progress that has been made with their donations. The Commission saved \$50,000 by replacing the former Lake Erie Calendar with the postcard.

***Policy and Management Meetings:*** The Commission conducts quarterly meetings that provide a forum for Ohio citizens and organizations and for the coordination of policies and management activities. Commission members represent the state of Ohio at other regional and international meetings about the Great Lakes.

***Public Education Program:*** The Commission's public education program provides for informing students and citizens about the benefits and concerns of Lake Erie. The Ohio Coastweeks program (see Additional Facts and Figures), the publication of the State of the Lake Report, and the Commission's newsletter and website are used to meet education goals.

***Funding Source:*** The Commission maintains two funds. In 1990, Substitute House Bill 804 was signed into law, establishing the Lake Erie Protection Fund 4C0. The Lake Erie Protection Fund receives thousands of individual donations, primarily through the Lake Erie license plate and Lake Erie credit card programs, gifts, donations and bequests. This fund is used solely to award competitive grants and contracts for projects that protect and enhance Lake Erie. This is accomplished through research, monitoring, demonstration and education projects concerning Lake Erie, its shoreline and watershed. Of particular interest to the Lake Erie Protection Fund are projects that further the objectives of Ohio's state, national, and international plans and commitments.

The second fund, the Lake Erie Resources Fund 5D8, receives Ohio's share of the earnings from the Great Lakes Protection Fund, an interstate trust fund established in 1990 to protect and restore the Great Lakes. These moneys are used to fund the operations of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission and Office.

The Lake Erie Commission receives no General Revenue Fund money.

***Line Items:*** 780-601, 780-602.

***Implication of Recommendation:*** Funding is increased by \$80,612 in FY 2002 (5.0% above estimated expenditures for FY 2001) and by \$54,116 in FY 2003 (3.2% above FY 2002). The recommended levels will allow the Commission to maintain its operations and work toward satisfying the objectives of the Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan. In addition, \$25,000 in each fiscal year is available for creating and publishing the second biennial State of the Lake Report-Lake Erie Quality Index. The increases for this biennium follow a decrease of 17.7% from FY 1999 to 2000 and an increase of 2.4% in FY 2001.

## PERMANENT AND TEMPORARY LAW

This section describes permanent and temporary law provisions contained in the executive budget that will affect the department's activities and spending decisions during the next biennium.

### **Permanent Law Provisions**

There are no permanent law provisions with fiscal effects on this agency.

### **Temporary Law Provisions**

#### **Transfer of excess funds from the Lake Erie Resources Fund to the Lake Erie Protection Fund**

This language would allow the Lake Erie Commission to transfer excess funds from the Lake Erie Resources Fund (Fund 5D8) to the Lake Erie Protection Fund (Fund 4C0). The Lake Erie Protection Fund is used for research and program grants that support the protection and restoration of Lake Erie. The fund has experienced a decrease in revenues from its license plates sales over the last three years. In order to help support ongoing and future grants, the transfer from the Lake Erie Resources Fund, which funds operations, is requested. Am. Sub. H.B. 215 of the 122<sup>nd</sup> G.A. authorized the transfer of \$750,000 from the Lake Erie Protection Fund to the Lake Erie Resources Fund to supplement operations. This transfer would allow the repayment of those funds.

## REQUESTS NOT FUNDED

The executive budget recommendation fully funds the program series included in the FY 2002-2003 budget request for the Lake Erie Commission. Total recommended appropriations are \$1,705,863 for FY 2002, and \$1,759,979 for FY 2003.

## LSC Budget Spreadsheet by Line Item, FY 2002 - FY 2003

<i>Fund</i>	<i>ALI</i>	<i>ALI Title</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>Estimated 2001</i>	<i>Executive 2002</i>	<i>% Change 2001 to 2002</i>	<i>Executive 2003</i>	<i>% Change 2002 to 2003</i>
<b><i>LEC Lake Erie Commission</i></b>								
4C0	780-601	Lake Erie Protection	\$ 889,835	\$1,022,362	\$ 1,044,854	2.2%	\$ 1,070,975	2.5%
5D8	780-602	Lake Erie Resources	\$ 479,414	\$602,889	\$ 661,009	9.6%	\$ 689,004	4.2%
<b>State Special Revenue Fund Group Total</b>			<b>\$ 1,369,249</b>	<b>\$ 1,625,251</b>	<b>\$ 1,705,863</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>\$ 1,759,979</b>	<b>3.2%</b>
<b>Total All Budget Fund Groups</b>			<b>\$ 1,369,249</b>	<b>\$ 1,625,251</b>	<b>\$ 1,705,863</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>\$ 1,759,979</b>	<b>3.2%</b>

## State Special Revenue Fund Group

### 4C0 780-601 Lake Erie Protection

1998	1999	2000	2001 Estimate	2002 Executive Proposal	2003 Executive Proposal
\$894,876	\$810,978	\$889,835	\$1,022,362	\$1,044,854	\$1,070,975
	-9.4%	9.7%	14.9%	2.2%	2.5%

**Source:** SSR: revenues generated from the issuance of Lake Erie license plates; and donations, gifts, bequests and other moneys received for the purposes of this section

**Legal Basis:** ORC 1506.23

**Purpose:** Funds in this line item are used to 1) accelerate the pace of research into the economic, environmental, and human health effects of contamination of Lake Erie and its tributaries; 2) fund cooperative research and data collection regarding Lake Erie water quality and toxic contamination; 3) develop improved methods of measuring water quality and establishing a firm scientific base for implementing a basin-wide system of water quality management for Lake Erie and its tributaries; 4) support research to improve the scientific knowledge on which protection policies are based and devising new and innovative cleanup techniques for toxic contaminants; 5) supplement state commitments to policies and programs pertaining to Lake Erie water quality and resource protection in a stable and predictable manner; 6) encourage cooperation with and among leaders from state legislatures, state agencies, political subdivisions, business and industry, labor, institutions of higher education, environmental organizations, and conservation groups within the Lake Erie basin; 7) award grants to any agency of the United States, any state agency, as defined in division (A)(2) of section 111.15 of the Revised Code, any political subdivision, any educational institution, or any nonprofit organization for the development and implementation of projects and programs that are designed to protect Lake Erie by reducing toxic contamination of or improving water quality in Lake Erie; 8) pay expenses authorized by the Ohio Lake Erie commission necessary to implement this chapter.

### 5D8 780-602 Lake Erie Resources

1998	1999	2000	2001 Estimate	2002 Executive Proposal	2003 Executive Proposal
\$708,875	\$484,181	\$479,414	\$602,889	\$661,009	\$689,004
	-31.7%	-1.0%	25.8%	9.6%	4.2%

**Source:** SSR: revenues generated from the Lake Erie credit card, gifts, bequests and other donations, as well as moneys awarded to the state from the Great Lakes Protection Fund

**Legal Basis:** ORC 1506.24

**Purpose:** Funds in this line item are used to support operating expenses of the Lake Erie Commission and Office.