



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW (Time 6:10)

LAKE ERIE WATERSNAKE (HOST ANN HAAS WITH LISA BROHL)

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Music plays.)

MS. HAAS: This is Ann Haas with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service talking to Lisa Brohl of the Black Swamp Conservancy in Ohio. Lisa are you there?

MS. BROHL: Yes, I am. And actually I am with our main conservancy based in Perrysburg, Ohio, the Black Swamp Conservancy and we are part of their Island chapter and we are based right on South Bass Island.

MS. HAAS: Well, very good. Tell us a bit about it will you, Lisa?

MS. BROHL: Sure. Our mission is to encourage conservation and protection of natural and agricultural lands in the Lake Erie Islands for the benefits of future generations. That is our formal mission statement but really, we do two things. We are out here to protect what is very unique as far land out here in the Lake Erie Islands whether it's by purchasing the land, working with others to do that or protecting it through conservation easements. And, the other important mission is of course educating people. Letting them know what is in their own backyards and why it is so important that it be protected.

So, we are kind of like a local clearinghouse for information because a lot of times people will approach somebody next door rather than make other phone calls. So, we are out here to represent the conservancy right here on the Island.

MS. HAAS: Now how did you get involved with the Fish and Wildlife Service?

MS. BROHL: We have been talking with them over the years when they were getting ready to list the snake as a threatened species and helped a little bit with some of the

early outreach efforts. We were formed ourselves in 2000 and we did get involved with them because we offer, also with the State of Ohio too, through conservation easements, where landowners can voluntarily place a portion of their property under restrictions as far as developing that, to provide habitat for the Lake Erie water snake, while they still get to keep the property themselves.

So, they helped monitor and set up that program that they had, the Division of Wildlife and also because of the threatened status of the snake, we have been able to work with the Fish and Wildlife Service to protect and purchase habitat as well. They helped us and another organization, the Western Reserve Conservancy, and our Put-in-Bay Township Park District to get a grant to preserve a large eight-acre parcel here on South Bass shoreline an excellent habitat for the Lake Erie water snake.

MS. HAAS: Tell us a bit about conservation easements. Are there incentives for landowners?

MS. BROHL: Yes, usually they are voluntary. What you actually are doing is donating a certain portion of the value of your property so they can be tax implications, for that you can receive a tax deduction for the difference between your property without an easement and with an easement in place. Also, if you are going to pass your property on to the next generation, there are implications for state taxes as well as conservation easements can help families. They don't have to be placed on the entire portion of the property it can be just the portion that they decide to set aside with restrictions for the water snake so it gives us another tool to be able to protect land without outright purchasing it.

MS. HAAS: Are the parcels that are protected mostly on the water then?

MS. BROHL: Yes, the Division of Wildlife had worked with the Fish and Wildlife Service and determine what the most critical habitat was and as long as it is within that critical habitat which is mostly shoreline and then a little bit inland for hibernation purposes. That is what we want to see protected. Of course that is the most expensive property that we have over here too because everybody wants a vacation home right on the lakeshore as well. So, if we can work with those property owners to set aside a portion for the snakes then that's a win, win situation for everybody.

Actually because the uniqueness of the snake, and that shoreline habitat that is good for the snake is also the most critical habitat for plants here on the Island and for migratory birds.

MS. HAAS: So a single action protects a range of species then.

MS. BROHL: Yes it does. Although it is in the name of the water snake, the unique habitat that created or made the Lake Erie water snake a distinct sub-species also is the unique habitat provides for all these other species as well. So, it really is the most critical habitat to protect over here.

MS. HAAS: So you mentioned some time ago that you have programs for children. Tell us about those.

MS. BROHL: We realize that the best way to actually get people to learn about our programs is actually through their kids and their grandkids. So, we do have several things going on. Probably the most popular and most successful has been our nature camp program for kids. We do a program at Middle Bass Island and also South Bass Island starting with preschooler's, four and five year olds all the way up to our middle adventure camp. Which is for the nine and ten and eleven and older groups. What we try to do is get them to learn as much about their Island as they can and we try to zero in on some of the least popular wildlife species.

We do a lot on insects, we do bats, we had a program on scat one year but we always have programs on the Lake Erie water snake and the kids just love the snakes. It has really been our best draw for everyone because we can send information home then to the parents and grandparents. We had one little boy in particular who his grandmother has just grown up hating snakes but here she is to pick up her grandson who is just raving about the water snakes and you know what he got to see and hold them and yeah. With all his excitement that is really our best calling card for Island conservation are the camps that the kids take home their enthusiasm.

And, we also have worked with the Lake Erie Island Historical Society to put together the Lake Erie Islands Nature and Wildlife Center, which does include water snake exhibits where visitors can come every day there. We have a wild Tuesday, every Tuesday where they can come and learn about different things but the most popular one is always, of course the water snakes.

MS. HAAS: Well that is terrific. Thank you so much, Lisa Brohl.

MS. BROHL: Thanks for the opportunity to talk.

MS. HAAS: This is Ann Haas with the Fish and Wildlife Service. Bye now.