



# LEWS NEWS



Photo: Kristin Stanford

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## Recovering Lake Erie's Natural Heritage

### Snakes, Snakes Everywhere! Are They Really Endangered?

Snakes, snakes everywhere! That is what we are hearing from islanders about the current Lake Erie Watersnake (LEWS) population. And research confirms what islanders are telling us—the LEWS population is increasing, as Dr. Richard King, Northern Illinois University, describes in his article on page 2. Likewise, goals for protected habitat outlined in the LEWS Recovery Plan are being achieved as well. The next area likely to be protected, 9 acres on East Point, South Bass Island, will complete the last protected habitat goal for LEWS, as described in the article on page 3. So with snakes abounding and habitat for the animal protected in perpetuity, are the LEWS really still a threatened species? The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is currently asking that very question, and is seeking your input.

The LEWS is currently listed as “threatened” under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and “endangered” under Ohio State law. Every five years, the Service must review the status of endangered and threatened species to ensure that their classification as threatened or endangered is accurate. The Service is currently examining the LEWS’s status along with any new information about the snake that has been obtained since the snake was listed in 1999.

Helpful to the review are reports, analyses or other new information on the LEWS that address population status and threats, population trends;

genetics and competition; habitat use, condition or amount; and effectiveness of current protections, management and conservation planning. A notice outlining specific information needs can be viewed at: <http://www.fws.gov/policy/library/E8-8707.pdf>.

New information received by the Service will be used to determine whether the population of LEWS is growing, shrinking, or stable, and to review the status of threats to the species. This new information will be weighed against the criteria used to list species as endangered or threatened to see if a change in listing status is warranted, or if the species no longer needs ESA protection.

Information on the LEWS may be sent to Field Office Supervisor, Attention: Lake Erie Watersnake 5-year Review, 6950-H Americana Parkway, Reynoldsburg, OH 43068-4127 or sent electronically to: [FW3MidwestRegion\\_5YearReview@fws.gov](mailto:FW3MidwestRegion_5YearReview@fws.gov). Please submit your information in Rich Text Format, or Plain Text Format. Information must be received by the Service by June 23 to be included in the status review. If you have any questions regarding this request, contact Ms. Megan Seymour at the above address, or at 614-469-6923 extension 16.

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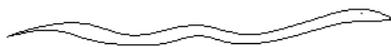
**Population Persistence Criterion of the Lake Erie Watersnake Recovery Plan Met!**

Recently compiled population estimates, based on census work from 1996 through 2007, indicate that the Population Persistence criterion of the Lake Erie Watersnake (LEWS) recovery plan has been met. This criterion specifies that for six or more years the overall population size on the U.S. islands reaches or exceeds 5,555 adults; populations reach or exceed 900 adults on Kelleys Island, 850 adults on South Bass Island, 620 adults on Middle Bass Island, and 410 adults on North Bass Island; and populations persist on Rattlesnake, Sugar, Green, Ballast, and Gibraltar Island. Estimates of adult population size (see table) were generated from capture-mark-recapture data at intensive study sites throughout the island region, from information on capture rate at less-intensive study sites, and from presence/absence data from still other sites. Based on these estimates, overall and island specific population size criteria have been met since 2002 with one exception. On North Bass Island, the population estimate for 2003 falls below the target number of 410. However, this is thought to be because of poor weather during the single census conducted in that year – estimates for both 2002 and 2004 do exceed 410 adults.

At present, population persistence on Rattlesnake, Sugar, Green, and Ballast Island has only been documented through 2006. However, plans are in place to visit those islands in spring 2008.

Population monitoring of LEWS will continue as part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recovery and monitoring process. This monitoring, together with data collected during past censuses, will provide an unusually detailed understanding of watersnake life. Much as life insurance companies compile information on human survival, investigators will be able to estimate such things as expected life span and risk of mortality for watersnakes and compare these estimates between males and females, juveniles and adults, among islands, and among years. This information will allow managers to make population projections into the future and thus fine-tune management strategies to better meet potentially conflicting conservation and social needs.

-Richard B. King  
Northern Illinois University



**Coming Soon: Public Opinion Surveys**

Past LEWS News issues have featured many articles about the Island Snake Lady (Kristin Stanford) and the LEWS surveys she and Dr. Rich King conduct each year. Now it's time for human surveys—opinion surveys, that is! As part of the LEWS Recovery Plan, public attitudes towards LEWS must be evaluated to determine if intentional persecution of snakes by humans is a significant threat to the continued survival of LEWS.

Year	Kelleys	South Bass	Middle Bass	North Bass	Small Islands	All U.S. Islands
2001	<b>1920</b>	<b>1510</b>	<b>1020</b>	170	830	5450
2002	<b>2130</b>	<b>1450</b>	<b>1300</b>	<b>610</b>	830	<b>6320</b>
2003	<b>2600</b>	<b>1500</b>	<b>2020</b>	270	830	<b>7220</b>
2004	<b>2870</b>	<b>1630</b>	<b>1690</b>	<b>440</b>	1270	<b>7900</b>
2005	<b>2210</b>	<b>1620</b>	<b>2630</b>	<b>630</b>	940	<b>8030</b>
2006	<b>2650</b>	<b>2830</b>	<b>4170</b>	<b>1240</b>	1430	<b>12320</b>
2007	<b>2520</b>	<b>3450</b>	<b>3970</b>	<b>930</b>	940	<b>11810</b>
Recovery goal	900	850	600	410		5555

Total estimated U.S. adult LEWS population size, 2001 – 2007. Estimates that exceed island-specific and overall population size goals specified in the LEWS recovery plan are shown in bold.

Public opinion surveys will be widely distributed to island residents and visitors this summer. Please take just a minute of your time and respond to the survey. The survey results will provide a clearer picture of how islanders and visitors feel about the LEWS, and if these feelings translate into actions that positively or negatively affect the snake population on the islands.

### South Bass Park is Going to the Birds, Snakes

Lisa Brohl didn't try to hide it.

Brohl, a longtime South Bass Island environmentalist and a commissioner for the newly formed Put-in-Bay Township Park District, was ecstatic over news that a regional land conservancy, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the park district had joined forces to acquire approximately 9 acres that provide critical island habitat for thousands of migratory birds and the threatened Lake Erie Watersnake.

"It is truly a gift for the future of the islands," Brohl said.

Western Reserve Land Conservancy, which protects important natural and agricultural property in 14 northern Ohio counties, and the recently formed park district have announced their intent to acquire land at the eastern tip of South Bass Island. Once acquired, the property will be permanently protected and opened to the public.

Land Conservancy officials said the immediate acquisition of the planned East Point Nature Preserve, which includes more than 1,700 linear feet of Lake Erie shoreline, is important because it has been under intense threat of development. The property provides critical habitat for the watersnake – a federally threatened, state endangered species – as well as for migratory songbirds and waterfowl.

The park district had wanted to acquire the property to keep it from becoming developed for waterfront homes but did not – until now – have the money to make the purchase. The Land Conservancy stepped in to acquire the property and will be holding it temporarily while raising money for the park district's purchase.

A \$1.8 million federal grant will cover about 70 percent of the \$2.6 million cost of buying the land, which would become part of the park district. Other funds will come from state grants, contributions from the Land Conservancy and pledges made to the Lake Erie Islands Chapter of the Black Swamp Conservancy. Brohl is chair of the chapter.

The Land Conservancy, in partnership with the park district, has launched a drive to raise the final \$253,000 needed to complete the purchase. The new park will have public access for bird-watching, walking and fishing.

U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D-9, of Toledo, whose district includes the Lake Erie Islands, praised the cooperation between the partners and called the acquired land "a gem in the crown of lake-related preservation and a gift preserved for future generations."

Brohl said this was the culmination of a seven-year effort to preserve the property.

The Land Conservancy and the park district have launched a fundraising drive to complete the purchase of the East Point Nature

Preserve. For more information on the drive, contact Leah Whidden, WRLC's director of development, at (440) 729-9621 or [lwhidden@wrlc.cc](mailto:lwhidden@wrlc.cc).

The project is receiving financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, ODNR's Division of Wildlife and Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, Clean Ohio, the FirstEnergy Foundation, the Sandusky Eagles Foundation and private donors.

-Western Reserve Land Conservancy



### Nature Camp at the Bay 2008

The Lake Erie Islands Chapter of the Black Swamp Conservancy together with the Lake Erie Islands Historical Society and the Put-in-Bay Recreation Committee will be sponsoring Nature Camp programs on South Bass Island this summer. We have some wonderful adventures planned this year for Nature Camp at the Bay. Camps range from My First Nature Camp for children 4-5 years of age to a new Discover Scuba program with the New Wave Dive Shop for ages 12 and older.

My First Nature Camp and Nature Camp will include programs on Animal Sign and Scat, Snakes, and Spiders with a trip to the Wildlife Museum on South Bass! The Environmental Adventure Camp 1 will be Kayaking and Camping. The Environmental Adventure Camp 2 will be Fishing and Camping. Camp dates, times, and fees are below. Times listed for the Environmental Adventure Camps may vary (on Wednesday and Thursday) with the planned camp outs. A complete schedule with meeting locations for all camps will be mailed after registration is received and before Camp begins. Call Lisa Brohl at 419-285-5811 or e-mail at leic\_bsc@cros.net for registration information.

June 27 Discover Scuba (Age 12 and up), 9:00am-12:00pm, Fee \$25

July 14-17 Nature Camp (Age 6-8), 10:00am-12:00pm or 1:00-3:00pm, Fee \$50

July 21-23 My First Nature Camp (Age 4-5), 9:00-10:30am or 11:00am-12:30pm, Fee \$30

July 21-24 Environmental Adventure Camp 1 (Age 9-10), 1:30-4:30pm, Fee \$75

Aug 4-7 Environmental Adventure Camp 2 (Age 11 and up), 9:00am-12:00pm, Fee \$75

Aug 8 Discover Snorkel (Age 9 and up), 9:00am-12:00pm, Fee \$25



### The Lake Erie Islands Nature and Wildlife Museum-Let's Make It Happen!

The Lake Erie Islands Chapter of the Black Swamp Conservancy and the Lake Erie Islands Historical Society are working together as the Lake Erie Islands Nature Museum Committee to purchase a 1.2-acre parcel of woodland on South Bass Island. This parcel would be preserved as undeveloped land for wildlife habitat and public use. The property is priced at \$80,000, which is below the appraised value. In addition, the owners Stan and Joey Wulkowicz, have agreed to donate an additional ½ acre and the former Alaskan Birdhouse Museum, including all museum contents, valued at \$374,935, if we purchase the woods. This is a great opportunity to purchase property that will not only protect a wooded part of island habitat, but also provide a natural history educational center for the South Bass Island community, visitors, and Nature Camp. Thanks to Stan and Joey for this generous opportunity!



Since our fundraising campaign began in December, we have been selling honorary square meters of the property for \$50 each. They come with an attractive certificate suitable for gifts and framing! We are also selling Lake Erie's Triple Threat fish prints by Wildlife Artist Joseph R. Tomelleri through The Natural Resource™ (TNR) to benefit the museum. They will be for sale at the LEIHS this summer for \$20/each or you can order online at: <http://www.thenaturalresource.com/fishprints.php> and enter LEIC as a promotional code. For each print sold online, TNR is donating \$5 for land protection on the Lake Erie islands. Raffle tickets will be sold at the Museum this season for a framed copy of this print (a \$200 value). We have been awarded a grant of \$25,000 from the Randolph J. and Estelle M. Dorn Foundation if we raise the remaining funds to complete the purchase. This brings our current total of pledges and donations toward this project to \$41,300-we need only \$38,700 more to reach our goal. We hope to complete the purchase this year and open this museum to the public. For more information, to make purchases of square meters or prints, or to make donations or pledges to this project, please contact the LEIHS Museum at 419-285-2804 or Lisa Brohl at 419-285-5811.

### Isles of Terror: Notes from 1749-1820

The title of this article is the name of a chapter in Michael Gora's new book *Early Adventures on Put-in-Bay, Middle Bass and Johnson's Island*. The book will be available starting May 31 at the Lake Erie Islands Historical Society at Put-in-Bay, at the Ottawa City General Store on Catawba Island, on the web at [www.middlebassbooks.com](http://www.middlebassbooks.com), and at a number of other local stores. It focuses mostly on lost stories about the Lake Erie Islands from the period 1786-1830, many of which have not been published anywhere in the past 175 years, and several of which deal with early snake encounters. The following is an excerpt from the chapter Isles of Terror: Notes from 1749-1820. The book contains footnotes for the information below.

In the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, rattlesnakes "lay in acres upon the lily-leaves basking in the sun, and hissing out a breath which struck death to the incautious mariner who ventured near these isles of terror."

Some of the earliest descriptions of the snakes have been documented by Thomas Langlois in a 1964 article. According to Mr. Langlois, "Near the western end of Lake Erie, there is a series of islands which were so notable for their snakes when the Jesuit explorer, Bonnacampe, visited the region on October 5, 1749, that he referred to them as 'Les Iles aux Serpentes' (The islands of snakes). A French soldier (J.C.B.), enroute from Presqu'ile, near the eastern end of Lake Erie, to Detroit, spent the night of July 21, 1754, on one of these islands, and recorded in his journal ... that his party killed 130 rattlesnakes before they dared to sleep. The map made by Chaussegros de Lery on August 4, 1754, bears the name used by Bonnacampe, but the map made in 1755 by d'Anville and the map made in 1766 by Mitchell label them 'Les Iles aux Serpens à sonette' (The islands of rattlesnakes)."

O. M. Spencer writes that in 1793, "We spent a part of Saturday afternoon in an excursion through the Middle Bass Island on which we killed several large rattlesnakes. I narrowly escaped being bitten by one at least three feet long over which I stepped as he crossed the path; and the captain, who had gone to a small pond a few hundred yards ahead of us to shoot ducks, returned in a short time running and out of breath, declaring that a monster, a snake more than a rod in length, the moment he fired at some ducks issued from the long grass by the edge of the water, and pursued him for more than 20 rods."

In 1878, W.H. Ballou, an early naturalist, observed "numerous enormous black water snakes darting through the water...sunning themselves in heaps, knots, and gnarls...Rattlesnakes were plentiful and caused annoyance for early settlers...so thick were they it is avowed that a man couldn't walk without treading on three or four of the varmints at every step..."

These references and others help us to appreciate the hardships of the early settlers and the early travelers. The last rattlesnakes on the islands weren't killed until the 1950s, but the problem had mostly disappeared by the time the islands became popular summer destinations in the 1860s and 1870s. Some "rattlesnakes" described in the above accounts may have been other species. Documented rattlesnake specimens have been found only on South Bass Island. Watersnakes strike, fox snakes vibrate their tails, and hognose snakes hiss. These behaviors result in all of these species being incorrectly identified as rattlesnakes by some.

Pigs had been released on some islands (including Middle Island) to eradicate snake populations. Collectors took their toll, as well - in July 1949, 200 garter snakes were removed from Middle Island. The following year a researcher found only one. Watersnakes were similarly captured in large numbers until they, too, were almost wiped out. One of the captives was 159 centimeters long, one of the largest watersnakes on record.



### Announcing the Annual Lake Erie Watersnake Census a.k.a. "Nerodio" 2008

Greetings Islanders! Spring is finally here and it is time once again to announce our annual census for Lake Erie Watersnakes (LEWS). My snake crew and I will be censusing the Bass Islands (May 26 – 30<sup>st</sup>) and then move over to Kelleys Island from May 31<sup>st</sup> – June 5<sup>th</sup>. Following that, we will return to the Bass Island area to finish up any unchecked sites. This year we also plan to census the smaller islands like Rattlesnake, Sugar and Ballast. As in the past, we will be visiting our traditional sites, however, we are also open to suggestions for new areas to investigate! Our current population estimates show that we have exceeded the number of adult LEWS needed for recovery on all islands! So guess what....we don't need any more snakes! Isn't That Fantastic News!!

The goal now and in the coming years will be to show that the populations are remaining stable. A personal goal of mine is also to get more islanders involved with our censuses! And you don't even have to touch the snakes if you don't want to! I welcome and encourage all island residents who are interested in spending a day with us to call or e-mail me and set something up. Finally, I sincerely want to thank all of you who have been supportive of our census over the past 8 years! Without it, we would not have been able to come as far as we have in the recovery of this species! As always, please feel free to e-mail or call with any questions or concerns. Thanks again and I'll look forward to seeing you on the shoreline!

Kristin Stanford ~ theislandsnakelady@yahoo.com



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REYNOLDSBURG, OH 43068-4127

### Island Days of Discovery

The Lake Erie Islands Historical Society is offering four Day of Discovery Programs through the Elderhostel Program. Grandparents can bring their grandkids to learn about the natural history of the Lake Erie Islands and have fun doing it! Proceeds from these educational programs go toward the Lake Erie Nature Museum Committee. Registration is through the Elderhostel Program at 877-426-8056 or online at [www.elderhostel.org](http://www.elderhostel.org).

May 4: Islands for the Birds with Tom Bartlett

June 20: Caves of South Bass Island with Erin Hazelton

July 15: Butterflies and Dragonflies with Dr. Carmen Trisler

August 23: Snakes of the Lake Erie Islands with Kristin Stanford

LEWS News online and in color! <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/Reynoldsburg/>

Have questions, comments, or ideas for LEWS News?

Contact us! [Megan\\_Seymour@fws.gov](mailto:Megan_Seymour@fws.gov)