

Section 7: Public Involvement

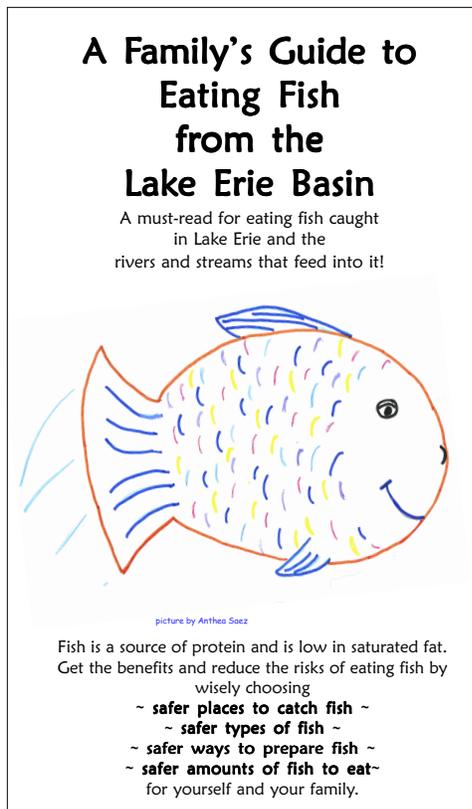
The U.S. and Canadian lead agencies for the Lake Erie LaMP have, from the beginning, believed public participation is crucial to the success of the LaMP process. Public involvement continues to be among the prime factors motivating proactive efforts taken by governments in Canada and the United States surrounding issues involving the Great Lakes. The LaMP Public Involvement Subcommittee was established to lead public outreach efforts.

To provide another mechanism for public involvement, the U.S. and Canadian governments fund the Lake Erie Binational Public Forum (Forum). This diverse and active group serves many purposes ranging from developing and implementing outreach projects and initiatives that educate the general public about Lake Erie issues, to providing advice to the LaMP Work Group based on member's individual expertise and/or input from the local constituents they may represent. The Forum works closely with the governmental representatives on the Lake Erie LaMP Work Group, including the Public Involvement Subcommittee.

As part of its public education goal, the Forum developed a colorful, informative 45-minute scripted presentation containing text and pictures describing Lake Erie's past, present, and foreseeable future under topics such as human health, recreation,

habitat protection and restoration, fish and wildlife, PCB and mercury reduction, RAPs, beneficial uses, land use, drinking water and exotic species. One of the incentives for preparing this presentation was to prepare the public to make informed decisions on future Lake Erie actions, particularly the selection of an ecosystem alternative and the associated management objectives. Forum members have delivered this presentation to many local groups, and received favorable feedback. It is available on line at: www.erieforum.org.presentation/about.php.

Another project of the Forum, initiated due to their interest in environmental justice issues, was the development of "A Family's Guide to Eating Fish from the Lake Erie Basin." The easy-to-read brochure presents the benefits and risks associated with eating Lake Erie fish, where not to fish, the types and sizes of fish to avoid eating, methods for preparing and cooking fish to reduce potential health risks, and contacts for more information. Working with local health departments in the Lake Erie basin, Forum members distributed fish consumption advisory information in many venues that targeted minorities or populations of at-risk consumers. Over 17,750 brochures have been distributed. The Forum's web site provides additional information on fish identification, local health department contacts and other handy references. The web site is available at: www.erieforum.org/fishguide/fishguide.php. Also of interest is that the Forum's overall web site (www.erieforum.org) was featured as the Great Lakes Information Network's (GLIN) site of the month for December 2001. The url for the GLIN site is: www.great-lakes.net.



In addition to funding the Forum, the U.S. and Canadian governments maintain a broad-based mailing list of the public interested in LaMP progress or who are involved in other environmental activities in the Lake Erie basin. From time to time, information concerning the Lake Erie LaMP is sent to people on the mailing list to foster an active network of the public interested in Lake Erie issues. For example, the latest edition of the Lake Erie LaMP newsletter, Update 2001, which also served as a companion piece to the Lake Erie LaMP 2000 document, was distributed to this mailing list. The public is also reached through the use of displays and handouts at third party meetings, such as the International Joint Commission's Public Forum on Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Water Quality held October 2001 in Montreal. When actions and activities related to

the Lake Erie LaMP warrant, the lead agencies issue press releases to specific media markets to facilitate media exposure to the general public.

Probably the most important single effort by the Public Involvement Subcommittee of the Lake Erie Work Group has been centered on outreach efforts related to developing ecosystem objectives. Beginning with the first public workshops in 1995 seeking input on the desired future uses of the lake, an adaptive approach has been taken to consult with the public on the selection of a preferred ecosystem alternative. The Public Involvement Subcommittee first worked closely with a group of technical experts to create a method to communicate to the public how a “fuzzy logic” model, developed by the LaMP’s Ecosystem Objectives Subcommittee, arrived at four viable scenarios (ecosystem alternatives) for Lake Erie’s future state. Then, the Forum was consulted and adjustments made to assure that the explanation of the process could be simply presented and easily understood by the public. (Note that the Forum’s Lake Erie Presentation was prepared by the Forum in response to the public need to better understand Lake Erie and the LaMP if they were to make an informed, educated choice of an ecosystem alternative.) Once the Work Group selected Ecosystem Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative, the Public Involvement Subcommittee sought the Forum’s advice to develop a scripted presentation to explain how and why the Work Group chose this alternative. This presentation has been used at several public sessions throughout the Lake Erie basin during late 2001/early 2002. These efforts have provided the Lake Erie Work Group and the Lake Erie Management Committee with valuable public input and insight.

Ongoing public involvement is important to the success of the Lake Erie LaMP, and public participation, consultation, and comment are welcome at any time in the LaMP process.

More information on the Lake Erie LaMP is available on the binational web site at: www.ec.gc.ca/glimr/lakes/erie/ or www.epa.gov/glnpo/lakeerie/. For more information or to become involved, please see the back cover.

