

COMPLETE STATEMENT  
OF

**EDWIN HAMMETT**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
**OHIO LAKE ERIE COMMISSION**

BEFORE THE OHIO SENATE  
FINANCE COMMITTEE

REGARDING  
FISCAL YEARS 2012-2013 OPERATING BUDGET

COLUMBUS, OHIO  
May 4, 2011

Good afternoon Chairman Widener, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Committee; my name is Ed Hammett and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission. I am pleased to appear before you today on behalf of the Lake Erie Commission to give testimony concerning our budget request for State Fiscal Years 2012-2013.

Lake Erie is Ohio's single most important natural resource. The Lake drives a ten (10) Billion dollar tourism industry with a little over one Billion attributable to recreational boating and fishing while Lake Erie maintains its reputation as the "Walleye Capital of the World". Lake Erie is the largest freshwater fishery in the world. At the same time, the lake serves as a drinking water source for 11 million people. The Lake's ports and shipping industry are vital to Ohio's agriculture and industry. Yet this great resource is extremely vulnerable to environmental stress. Significant algae blooms, sediment loading, and increases in nutrient loading over the past 10-15 years threaten the resource. This environmental stress can negatively impact the economic value by affecting tourism, recreation, and shipping as well as the public's water supply. The

protection and restoration of Lake Erie is essential in order to maintain the Lake in its present role as an economic driver.

The mission of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission and its office is to protect and restore Lake Erie and its watershed. The Commission strives for this by developing and monitoring policies and programs of state government pertaining to water quality, fish & wildlife, habitat protection, economic development, coastal management, and other state actions impacting Lake Erie.

The Commission is comprised of the directors of six state agencies including the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and the Departments of Natural Resources, Transportation, Development, Health, and Agriculture and the office is located in Toledo.

The Commission has focused on five activities in accomplishing their mission. These are:

- (1) Formal quarterly meetings of the Commission for state agencies to plan, develop and monitor implementation activities concerning Lake Erie, as well as providing a forum for Ohio citizens and organizations to voice their concerns to senior officials of state government.
- (2) Preparation and implementation of the *State of the Lake Report ~ Lake Erie Quality Index*, *Lake Erie Protection & Restoration Plan (LEPR)*, and *periodic LEPR Progress Reports*. These reports provide the direction for Ohio's programs to protect and restore Lake Erie as well as the promotion of economic development associated with Lake Erie.

(3) Awarding research and implementation grants through the Lake Erie Protection Fund to implement the objectives of the Commission's *Lake Erie Protection & Restoration Plan*. The projects address a spectrum of needs, including balanced growth and development, coastal and watershed management, wetlands restoration, invasive species control, soil conservation, storm water management, development of Lake Erie tourism opportunities, water quality improvement and fisheries research.

(4) Implementing the *Lake Erie Balanced Growth Program* has been a priority activity enabling state and local governments to align their efforts to encourage development in some areas and protection of resources in other areas.

(5) Conducting a public education program to increase the awareness of Ohioans to the benefits and concerns of Lake Erie.

The Commission has traditionally maintained two accounts. First, the Lake Erie Protection Fund (4C0) receives thousands of individual donations from Ohioans through the sale of Lake Erie license plates and specific project related contributions. This Fund is used solely to award grants and contracts for research and implementation projects. The Commission is requesting a Biennium total of \$800,000. This biennium request is a decrease from the \$900,000 request in the past biennium reflecting a decline in available funds due to a decrease in Lake Erie license plate sales.

The second fund, the Lake Erie Resources Fund (5D8), receives Ohio's share of the earnings from the Great Lakes Protection Fund (GLPF). The GLPF is an interstate trust fund that returns one-third (1/3) of the earnings to the participating states for support of Great Lakes activities.

The Commission is requesting a biennium total of \$511,926 for the Lake Erie Resources Fund. This represents an apparent decrease from the current biennium request of \$763,000. This decrease is the result of the newly created Lake Erie Federal Grants fund (3EP0) described below and the Commission's continuing efforts to trim its operation's budget.

The new Lake Erie Federal Grants fund (3EP0) was established in SFY 2011 to include receipts from federal grant dollars being utilized by the Commission. A portion of the grant funds are being used for support of Commission staff while most of these funds are being passed through as grants for specific projects: to Ohio Sea Grant to identify research and management options; and to the Toledo Lucas County Port Authority to develop dredged material management projects.

The Ohio Lake Erie Commission Office receives no General Revenue Funds.

Priority activities for the next two years include support for research into the recent declines in Lake Erie water quality and identification of management practices to reverse the decline, continued management of the Lake Erie Protection Fund's grant cycle processes, continuation of the Commission's Balanced Growth Program, development of the next State of the Lake Report, implementing the *Lake Erie Protection & Restoration Plan*, expansion of the economic development opportunities for the Lake Erie basin, and promotion of Lake Erie awareness.

Thank you.