

**TERMS OF REFERENCE
FOR THE
HABITAT TASK GROUP (HTG) OF
THE LAKE ERIE COMMITTEE (LEC)**

Revised April, 2011

TITLE: The Lake Erie Habitat Task Group (HTG)

BACKGROUND: The Lake Erie Habitat Task Group was formed in 1999 to address charges from the Lake Erie Committee (LEC) and the Standing Technical Committee (STC) that required a coordinated response to habitat issues. Charges to the HTG have included development of Environmental Objectives (to support achievement of Fish Community Goals and Objectives), development of a strategy to work with the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) initiative for development of a Lakewide Management Plan (LaMP), liaison and support of an international geographic information system (GIS) implementation, and inventory of rehabilitation projects.

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Lake Erie Habitat Task Group has adopted the following principles:

- The Fish Community Goals and Objectives are a shared vision amongst management agencies.
- Healthy environments and habitats provide the template for conservation and rehabilitation of healthy aquatic communities and sustainable fisheries.
- Healthy environments and habitats are a product of a dynamic equilibrium of physical structuring forces (*i.e.* climate, hydrology, and geology and the processes that act on them) as seen via weather, water flows, currents, water levels, sediment and nutrient loads, and coastal processes.
- Actions to achieve Environmental Objectives will support achievement of the shared Fish Community Goals and Objectives.

The mission of the HTG is to support achievement of fish community goals and objectives through achievement of supporting environmental objectives. To achieve this mission, the members of the Habitat Task Group uphold the following tenets:

- **Advocacy-** The HTG will work with LEC member agencies to ensure conservation and resource management agencies are aware of the Lake Erie Environmental Objectives, and will promote actions that recognize the importance of healthy environments and habitats to fish community structure and function.
- **Monitoring-** The HTG will work with LEC member agencies to develop strategies to: 1) summarize information concerning the status of Lake Erie habitats, 2) report on progress towards rehabilitation of degraded habitats, 3)

identify emerging habitat issues and concerns, and 4) support the application of best available science to current and emerging habitat issues.

- **Science and Technology-** The HTG will support application of the latest technologies to habitat information management such as acoustics, remote sensing, GIS, and spatial analysis.
- **Objectivity-** The HTG maintains objectivity through emphasis on a scientific approach.
- **Membership-** LEC member agencies will provide personnel to address HTG charges. Task group members are selected by their parent agencies. Advisory and non-agency personnel can be appointed to the HTG at the discretion of the STC and LEC, following the Terms of Reference for LEC Task Group Responsibilities and Membership. If a member is withdrawn from the group, the parent agency may provide a replacement person.
- **Task Group Chairing** - A single chair or co-chairs will be selected by HTG consensus and approved by the STC and LEC. At least one chair must belong to an LEC member agency, but a co-chair may also come from other agencies signatory to the Joint Strategic Plan (USGS, DFO-Canada, USFWS, NMFS). These roles will alternate periodically at the discretion of the HTG, STC and LEC. Task group chairs will serve as the primary liaison between the Task Group, the STC, and the LEC. In this capacity, task group chairs will serve to facilitate achievement and reporting on charges to the LEC, will administer the routine operations of the task group including the organization of meetings, conference calls, and recording of minutes, and will manage requests for task group data from outside agencies. Chairing commitments will extend a minimum of two years, and alternate periodically at the discretion of the HTG, STC, and LEC. See the LEC Task Group Responsibilities and Membership for further discussion and responsibilities of chairing.
- **Cooperation-** The members of the HTG will share responsibilities for collecting and collating interagency data, running analyses, producing reports and creating presentations. Members will follow the Protocol for Use of Habitat Task Group Data and Reports to prevent misinterpretation of data or unauthorized use (see HTG 2003 report).
- **Transparency-** The members of the HTG will share information with the STC, LEC, other Task Groups, and will communicate results to stakeholders and the public. See the **LEC Task Group Responsibilities and Membership** for further discussion.

CHARGES: Charges will be assigned to the HTG by the STC and LEC in order to meet the primary objectives and to address specific tasks important to the LEC. On an annual basis, the STC and LEC determine whether the charges have been completed satisfactorily or if they require further elaboration.

REPORTING: One Co-chairperson of the HTG, on an alternating basis, will report formally at the annual meeting of the LEC on the activities of the HTG. In addition, the Co-chairpersons of the HTG or individual Task Group members may be asked to report

on critical issues to the STC and to the Chairperson or LEC membership at other times, including the annual Pre-LEC meeting, seasonal LEC and/or STC business meetings, and other times as necessary. An annual written report summarizing HTG charges and activities toward those charges will be produced for the LEC, with the scheduled release to the public at the conclusion of the annual LEC meeting.

CONSENSUS APPROACH: HTG issues will be resolved by member consensus. If consensus cannot be achieved on an issue, then it will be referred to the STC, then to the LEC for resolution.

DATA SHARING: All data used to create the FTG report are shared freely among agencies. The report is available to the public online at www.GLFC.org, and from the distribution of reports at the annual LEC meeting. Agencies may not share with the public any other agency and/or task group data or intellectual property without the expressed consent of the originating agency.

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS: The HTG will meet as deemed necessary by its' members, the STC, or the LEC, to address charges, with the intent to meet at least once annually.

SUPPORT: Salary and traveling expenses of the members of the HTG will be the responsibility of the parent agencies, unless otherwise provided through an arrangement of the GLFC or other external funding sources.