



Great Lakes Islands Conservation Workgroup

Prospectus

Background

There are approximately 32,000 islands in the Great Lakes, spread across every Great Lake and connecting channel. It is the largest, most diverse collection of freshwater islands in the world. Many are home to rare and endemic species and exemplary natural communities. Island functions include serving as nesting grounds and stopover habitat for migratory species. Islands may serve as refuges under a changing climate and other development stressors. Additionally, many islands have economic, cultural, social, spiritual and historic relevance.

Despite being a vital part of the natural, cultural and historic heritage of the Great Lakes, islands management has been limited and disjointed. Compared to the mainland, working on islands is more logistically complicated and costly, largely due to distance and isolation. There is generally poor awareness about island needs among mainland decision-makers. Islands are not without threats, even the most remote and undeveloped. Lack of attention may also be causing opportunities to be missed.

While islands are individually unique in character, geography, ownership and function, governments and organizations may benefit from improved communication and collaboration across political and organization boundaries. Regular dialogue would allow for better integration of islands into existing programs and may lead to new programs and projects.

Status

Recognizing this gap in conservation, the Great Lakes Coastal Assembly formed the Great Lakes Islands Conservation Workgroup in January 2022 to serve as the coordinating body to identify and promote strategic actions to protect and restore islands. Activities are guided by a Mission, Goals, and Objectives (see reverse).



Contacts

- **Eric Ellis**, Great Lakes Commission, eellis@glc.org
- **Matt Preisser**, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, PreisserM@michigan.gov

*Main Photo: Saint Martin Island,
Jesse Lincoln/Michigan Natural
Features Inventory
Side Photo: South Bass Island,
Lake Erie, Shores & Islands Ohio*

Mission: To advance the conservation of Great Lakes islands.

Goals

- Foster collaboration and relationships between scientists, managers, indigenous communities, property owners and other island advocates.
- Support regional and local island decision-making with respect to islands, including prioritization of conservation actions.
- Improve awareness about islands, particularly among mainland audiences.

Objectives

Objective 1: Serve as a forum for regular information sharing, coordination, and collaboration across political and organizational boundaries.

Activity 1.1: Develop Workgroup structure and operations.

Activity 1.2: Regularly convene via virtual and in-person meetings.

Activity 1.3: Showcase specific island experiences by sharing projects, plans, and case studies.

Activity 1.4: Connect with other topic- or place-based organizations and partnerships across the Great Lakes and beyond.

Outcome 1: improved alignment among island practitioners and other entities on conservation issues.

Objective 2: Elevate and integrate islands into existing programs as well as new management/planning activities.

Activity 2.1: Identify and compile major sources of information on islands, with emphasis on rare, endemic, and migratory species, unique habitats, and ecosystem services/functions.

Activity 2.2: Promote research on islands.

Activity 2.3: Track/support monitoring to assess island conditions and trends.

Activity 2.4: Prioritize islands or island sites for protection, enhancement, and restoration.

Activity 2.5: Offer technical assistance to governments, conservancies, and others with oversight or interest in islands.

Outcome 2: a synthesis of island conditions and plan for addressing island conservation needs.

Objective 3: Conduct outreach and education.

Activity 3.1: Present findings at scientific conferences and meetings.

Activity 3.2: Develop public-friendly outreach materials.

Outcome 3: greater recognition about the unique ecological, cultural, and social attributes and needs of islands.