

2022 Great Lakes Islands Summit on the Lake Erie Islands, October 2-5, 2022

After two years of pandemic delays, the voluntary, bi-national Great Lakes Islands Alliance (GLIA) recently held its marquee event, the Great Lakes Islands Summit, across four island communities in Lake Erie: South Bass (Put-in-Bay), Middle Bass, and Kelleys Islands in Ohio and Pelee Island in Ontario. This was GLIA's fourth such Summit since 2017 and the first to span multiple islands. The Summit rotates to a different island(s) each year and allows that community to showcase its successes and challenges to visiting leaders from other islands across the vast Great Lakes region and beyond.

In 2022, a total of 89 participants came from eight states and one province, including as far away as Maine and Florida. This included islanders from 13 Great Lakes island communities plus additional partners and advocates from mainland organizations. As a sign of the times, a number of additional people sent late regrets and had to cancel due to family, COVID, professional commitments, and even Hurricane Ian complications.

The start to this year's Summit was almost scuttled due to high winds and a possible shutdown of the ferry to South Bass Island on Sunday. But islanders are a resilient group and despite some sizable swells everyone began to arrive Sunday afternoon. The fall weather for the rest of the Summit was spectacular!

The Sunday night reception and mingling, coupled with a tasty turkey dinner at the Boathouse Bar and Grill, set the tone for the Summit. For the next three days, we would start with a 7am eye-opener breakfast and work session and then proceed to site visits and other activities, with each day focusing on a different island community.

The Summit formally began on Monday morning with a welcome from the GLIA Steering Committee chair and local dignitaries. GLIA then recognized each participating island with our own "Parade of Islands," playing off the Olympics' Parade of Nations. A short GLIA business session provided some background on the fledgling network for newer members. We then heard a presentation from a team of graduate students from the University of Michigan School for Environment and Sustainability who are working with GLIA to develop an action plan for future growth and development.

Monday morning tours on South Bass (Put-in-Bay) included infrastructure and tourism destinations. The Infrastructure tour went to the Senior Center and PIB Volunteer Fire Department where heads of the Senior Center, Police, Fire and EMS explained island services. From there they went to the library and were given a tour of the PIB K-12 school. They then visited the National Park Service Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial for a talk about the three-year seawall reconstruction by Superintendent Barbara Rowles. They then visited the PIB airport for an explanation by

Port Authority Secretary Rosann Keiser about how the airport plays a vital role in transportation, mail delivery, and freight forwarding.

Meanwhile, the Tourism tour went to Perry's Cave to see the cave and butterfly house and listened to Dee Dee Duggan, owner of the cave and Island Transportation, explain the evolution of island transportation and hospitality. This theme continued as the tour went to the Heineman Winery to hear Ed Heineman, head winemaker, explain the island's wine industry, but since it was mid-morning, the beverage offered to the participants was grape juice. The next stop was the South Bass Island State Park and a photo op at the new "Put-in-Bay" sign. The Lake Erie Islands Nature and Wildlife Center was visited and hosted by GLIA Steering Committee alternate Renee Fultz who spoke about how the Center has expanded their displays and programmes offered to the public

Both tours then went to the Miller Boat Line's Lime Kiln Dock and were transported to Middle Bass Island for lunch served by the Island Grind. Keynote speaker was Dr. Jeffrey Reutter, who has over 50 years working on Great Lakes issues, most recently as former Director of Ohio Sea Grant and Stone Lab. Dr. Reutter gave an information-packed overview of Lake Erie including its ecosystems and fisheries plus threats like pollution and eutrophication. His PowerPoint presentation will be made available to GLIA members. Dr. Reutter noted that island communities are surrounded by water and have more at stake than anyone. GLIA recommends that all islanders hear or view his recommendations on how we all must take an active role and become voices in the future for water quality and fisheries for all the Great Lakes.

After lunch, all participants were taken by bus to see examples of land conservation, as explained by Lisa Brohl. This was followed by a walking tour, led by Robert Skul, to see the former Lonz Winery, MBI Marina and the state park, a great example of a public-private partnership. At 6pm we all took the Miller Ferry to downtown PIB for another dinner at the Boathouse, followed by entertainment at the island's favorite night spot, "The Round House Bar".

Tuesday breakfast was at 7am to allow an 8:30am departure on the Jet Express to Kelleys Island. Everyone stopped for a group photograph before boarding Island Transportation buses to visit the world renowned "Glacial Grooves" explained by Chris Ashley of the Ohio DNR. We also visited a historic stone crushing site and the Kelleys Island alvar. Next, we headed to the KI School for lunch and presentation by KI superintendent Todd Hanes who explained the challenges of operating a school with such low enrollment that the number of teachers often exceeded the number of students. The KI elementary school students, led by music teacher CC Wisniewski provided a musical interlude before Mr. Hanes gave his inspiring presentation on how the KI School is used in multiple ways by KI citizens. Attendees asked a number of good questions that gave rise to potential ways GLIA may help assist island educators going forward.

In the afternoon we visited a pollinator habitat developed on public land near the airport that supports dozens of species of insects including migrating monarch butterflies. Jackie Taylor and Chris Ashley laid out the process for developing the habitat which will prove useful to others planning similar facilities elsewhere. The final stop on Kelleys was at Charles Herndon's sculpture studio and gallery which provided a good example of how the arts can be an integral part of island commerce.

We returned to Put-in-Bay and headed to the Boardwalk dock for the water taxi to Gibraltar Island, a small nearby island owned by Ohio State University and home to the OSU Stone Lab, classrooms, dorms and Cooke's Castle. OSU Students gave GLIA participants a detailed overview of the island's history and role in understanding the ecology of Lake Erie. After returning to PIB, we were treated to an outstanding meal at the 'Upper Deck' at the Boardwalk Restaurant and a presentation by Dr. Brian Alford, Assistant Director at Stone Lab, about their mission and current research programs.

Following breakfast at 7:00 am on Wednesday we undertook some GLIA business which included affirming membership on the Steering Committee for the coming year and hearing suggestions for our focus over the next few years. Among other topics, there was resounding agreement that emphasis should be given to finding ways to support and connect island educators, a key element to supporting sustainable, year-round island communities. GLIA members also advocated for finding new ways to influence policy, perhaps through a shared voice.

At 8:15 am we boarded the Jet Express to cross the international border to Pelee Island. Thanks to Sharon Cox for creating our manifest and Captain Kelly Freimark for managing to sign up late participants, we arrived at Pelee Island and passed through Customs ahead of schedule. We were greeted by our GLIA host Dave DeLellis in the island trolley and taken to the Pelee Island Winery where Alyssa Dreiman-Staples' winery team was ready with coffee and tea.

The program included presentations by the Pelee Island Township clerk, Pelee island historian Ron Tiessen, marketing director Matthew Gale, and inspirational speaker George Paisiovich who has a long history of working with and for multiple levels of government. He provided a detailed example of how Pelee residents united to foster a better relationship with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources through non-combative messaging and coordinated meetings. This is often viewed as an shining example of how mainland governments should collaborate with small, rural communities. It was awesome to hear about the David and Goliath scenario and the success that came from George's leadership.

After the morning program, a gourmet lunch (including wine tasting) was served with contributions by all the restaurants on Pelee Island. After lunch, there was a long line to buy a bottle or two of wine! That afternoon we split into three tour groups: wine making

and history, conservation and infrastructure. Some saw the Vin Villa, a historic wine cellar and group venue, and some saw the butterfly sanctuary and the Nature Conservancy of Canada's newly constructed wetlands. Others saw the Pelee Island Heritage Center, the native drum circle program at the quarry, and the historic Stone House, now a beautiful restaurant and brewery.

We rounded everyone up for a quick trip home on the Jet Express to downtown Put-in-Bay where we were greeted by the U.S. Customs team to check us in. We said our goodbyes and went our separate ways. GLIA Steering Committee member Joe Shorthouse commented, "Great Summit! It will take weeks to digest all that we learned and to establish dialogues with new contacts. Well done Peter and your team". And it was really a team effort. Thank you!

To learn more about GLIA, please visit our website, <https://glialliance.org/>

Questions about the 2022 Great Lakes Islands Summit should be directed to Peter Huston, GLIA Project Manager, at phuston@stewardshipnetwork.org