

2022 Great Lakes Islands Summit

October 2-5, 2022

Lake Erie Islands



Summary Report

December 6, 2022

The 4th Annual Meeting of the Great Lakes Islands Alliance



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Front photo credit: Peter Huston

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- Our many sponsors who provided direct financial support or in-kind donations of goods and services for the 2022 Islands Summit. See Appendix A for list of sponsors.
- The GLIA Steering Committee which provides oversight and guidance for GLIA.
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Participants at 2022 Islands Summit. Photo credit: Chase Eagleson, Jet Express

About the Great Lakes Islands Alliance

The Great Lakes Islands Alliance (GLIA) is a voluntary, collaborative, bi-national network that brings together island leaders, residents, and advocates from across the Great Lakes. Its mission is to “encourage relationship building, foster information exchange, and leverage resources to address shared challenges and embrace opportunities to benefit islands.”

At present, the membership of GLIA is composed of approximately 175 islanders from 20 different island communities in both the United States and Canada. Membership is open to any islander, both year-round and seasonal. GLIA’s membership includes a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives, including elected officials, members of island boards and committees, Chambers of Commerce and other economic development organizations, non-profit organizations, island schools, EMS/fire/police organizations, property owner associations, island businesses, museums, libraries, historical societies, and other property owners. Additionally, there are 30 individuals from mainland entities (government, universities, non-profits, and others) who believe in the mission of GLIA and support the network, either directly or indirectly, as Partners and Observers.

GLIA achieves its objectives through multiple means, primarily information sharing and advocacy. Our core function is to connect islanders to one another plus governments, decision-makers, and other thought leaders on the mainland. Open membership meetings occur monthly throughout the year, supplemented by additional communications through email, webinars, and use of traditional and social media. GLIA meets in person once per year at our annual Great Lakes Islands Summit (Summit), the focus of this report.

Priority is given to topics of interest to island communities. Sometimes these are unique to islands (e.g., ferry systems) while other topics are also pertinent to mainland communities, however GLIA views them through an island lens. GLIA organizes its efforts into two separate, but not mutually exclusive, focus areas.

First, *Environmental Stewardship* seeks to “protect and conserve the natural environment on islands.” Island communities care about Great Lakes water quality and quantity, biodiversity conservation, pollution prevention, waste management, recycling, and climate adaptation and resiliency.



Left: Nature Conservancy of Canada staff describe a wetland restoration project on Pelee Island. Photo credit: Shelby Harris
Right: GLIA members hear about efforts to create pollinator habitat on Kelleys Island. Photo Credit: Shores & Islands Ohio

Second, *Socio-Economic Wellbeing* seeks to “foster a robust quality of life for year-round islanders, seasonal residents, and visitors alike.” GLIA explores topics as diverse as tourism, blue economy (water-based) opportunities, health and safety, education, housing, infrastructure, cultural/historic heritage, and local governance and capacity.



GLIA members learn about fire, police, and EMS on South Bass Island (left) and tour the historic Lonz Winery, now a state park, on Middle Bass Island. Photo credit: Matt Preisser

For additional information on GLIA, including our Charter, Annual Reports, map of participating islands, and more, please visit our website: <https://glialliance.org>

Summit Background and Logistics

The Summit is the annual member meeting of GLIA. The event serves as the forum for members to meet and interact with each other, learn from experts on topics of interest to islands, and provide input into network-wide business. The event rotates to a different island each year with a team from the local island community serving as host. In this role they draft the agenda, liaise with local island leaders and organizations, and interface with potential sponsors. The GLIA Steering Committee and Partner Organizations provide oversight and support. The Summit always includes some general GLIA business but otherwise reflects the focal points and character of the host community.

The first three Summits were held on Beaver Island, Michigan (Lake Michigan) in 2017, Madeline Island, Wisconsin (Lake Superior) in 2018, and Mackinac Island, Michigan (Lake Huron) in 2019. In fall 2020, the fourth Summit was to shift to Lake Erie, however it was postponed due to the global pandemic. The event was postponed again in 2021 due to on-going travel uncertainty between jurisdictions (particularly the international border crossing), increased travel and food costs (exacerbated by rising gas prices and supply chain issues), and continued health and safety concerns for our attending members and the host community.

The event finally occurred on October 2-5, 2022. GLIA's first "progressive"-style event, this Summit spanned four islands in Lake Erie: Kelleys, Middle Bass, and South Bass Islands in the State of Ohio and Pelee Island in the Province of Ontario. Of note, this Summit also required an international border crossing. South Bass Island, otherwise known as Put-in-Bay, served as event headquarters as it was centrally located and had diverse food and lodging options available into October. There were 88 attendees at the 2022 Summit (see Appendix B for the final list with contact information).



The Boathouse Bar and Grill greets GLIA members to Put-in-Bay in 2022. Photo Credit: Matt Preisser



Group discussion at the Boathouse Bar and Grill, Put-in-Bay. Photo Credit: Joe Shorthouse

Meeting Content

For GLIA's first multi-island Summit, it chose to emphasize site visits to all four island communities. Surveys conducted after previous Summits had shown that attendees valued seeing each other's communities and talking to people on the front lines. As a practical matter, travel between the islands takes time. This meant there was less emphasis on full-group (plenary) presentations or work sessions that is typical of many conferences. Attendees used the travel time for additional networking and relationship building. A post-event survey showed that this style of conference was generally well received.



Boarding the inter-island ferry. Photo Credit: Jakob Grubb



Travel by tour train. Photo credit: Joe Shorthouse

The agenda itself was set up to focus on 1-2 islands each day: South Bass Island and Middle Bass Islands on Monday, October 3; Kelleys Island on Tuesday, October 4; and Pelee Island on Wednesday, October 5. An optional trip to a smaller fifth island, Gibraltar Island, home to The Ohio State University's Stone Laboratory, was offered before dinner on Tuesday.

For the full final agenda and meeting narrative, see Appendix C and Appendix D, respectively.

Key Take-Aways/Next Steps

Discussions at the Summit provides general direction for the next year. While there were many valuable ideas offered, a groundswell of support focused on the following:

- *Find new ways to connect with mainland decision-makers and develop a regional voice.* GLIA will continue to identify key public input and engagement opportunities for island communities. These include those organized by governments at the federal, state, and provincial levels plus regional influencers like the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, International Joint Commission, Great Lakes Commission, and Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers. There are additional organizations at the international or global level such as Island Innovation and the Climate Strong Islands Network. At a minimum, GLIA will seek out these opportunities and hand them off to the islands, allowing each community to respond as it feels fit.

Discussion at the Summit went further and explored whether/how GLIA might collate input across all the islands and serve as a conduit for collective response. This idea came up in response to Great Lakes water quality and related environmental matters, however it pertains to social and economic issues as well.



2022 Islands Summit Keynote speaker Dr. Jeff Reutter discussing Great Lakes water quality. Photo Credit: Matt Preisser

Potential ideas include group resolutions or white papers. A key procedural challenge for GLIA is lack of internal processes to discuss, draft, and share the “common voice” in whatever form that takes. This includes determining what topics GLIA should weigh in on, what exactly we would say, and how it is voted/approved. GLIA does not seek to usurp the independence of individual islands or replace existing pathways that may exist between these communities and their governments. GLIA will continue to align with and learn from networks and organizations around the region, nationally, and globally which have similar interests and may already be performing similar tasks.



Left: GLIA members tour Gibraltar Island, home of OSU's Stone Laboratory. Photo credit: Matt Preisser

Right: Observations of coastal habitat and shoreline erosion on Middle Bass Island. Photo credit: Jackie Taylor

- *Explore ways to support island educators/schools.* Island schools are recognized as focal points in their community. The rural, isolated nature of islands presents unique challenges (as well as some opportunities) for school children, families, teachers, and administrators. The 2022 Summit visits to the schools on South Bass and Kelleys Islands were particularly poignant and stirred interest in exploring potential roles for GLIA. This included facilitating more formal/regular connection between teachers on different islands; sharing administrator experiences attracting and maintaining teachers; sharing unique programs (e.g., clubs, class offerings) between islands; and eliminating other barriers such as access to training and professional development.



Island educators greet the visitors.

Photo credit: Matt Preisser

- *Continue to grow the GLIA membership.* The number and diversity of islanders participating in GLIA is one of its key strengths. However, there is great opportunity to continue to expand. Strictly speaking, the number of participating islanders is not a primary metric for GLIA; rather,

greater participation will improve GLIA's potential impact for individual islands as well as the collective network. GLIA should look to attract new Great Lakes island communities (particularly those in Lake Ontario) as well as improve awareness within islands already participating. On some islands, GLIA has become fairly well known while on others it is not. The number of participants varies widely by island, ranging from several islands with only a few participants to other islands with more than 15 people each. Each Summit succeeds in drawing in new individuals from the local host community(ies) and this year was no exception. GLIA needs to consider its processes of attracting new members – which is to say, mostly passive word-of-mouth –and whether more targeted approaches should be undertaken, for example aimed at certain “underrepresented” islands or island sectors.

- *Maintain and grow GLIA's core capacity.* In terms of “capacity,” we mean the people responsible for performing GLIA's central body of work and professional backbone support. Currently this includes a five-member Steering Committee and five Alternates (all volunteers) plus several individuals from three Partner Organizations. At present, two Partner staff perform the far majority of GLIA's tasks – the GLIA Coordinator (0.25 FTE), employed by the State of Michigan and funded through federal Great Lakes restoration dollars, and the GLIA Project Manager (0.75 FTE), employed by the non-profit The Stewardship Network (TSN) and funded through a two-year foundation grant. Additional Partners from TSN and the Island Institute participate without funding and at the will of their employers. Maintaining and encouraging islander volunteerism is critical to GLIA's mission and desire to be “for islanders, by islanders.” After this Summit, a number of new islanders expressed willingness to take leadership roles in GLIA. At the same time, permanent (paid) staff support remains vital to provide stability and ultimately achieve GLIA's ever-growing portfolio of wants.

GLIA will continually consider how to advance these needs over the next year. In particular, in 2021 we started a partnership with the University of Michigan's School for Environment and Sustainability. A team of three graduate students are focusing on GLIA and the unique needs of island communities as the focus for their master's degree project. We look forward to their results and recommendations, expected in 2023, which will help advise GLIA on its organizational trajectory.

Conclusions

GLIA's tradition of placing its marquee event within one of its member communities – as opposed to a central mainland site, which would theoretically be easier to access and have more facilities – continues to bear fruit. The best way to learn about a community is to experience it first-hand. Island communities possess inherent complexity that belies their small size. To understand this complexity, you must ride the ferry, meet the islanders on their own turf, and witness the island's unique character.

Further, the 2022 Summit once again proved the value of relationships. After two years of pandemic-related delays, there was a pent-up demand to meet in person. GLIA members relished being able to rekindle old relationships and make new ones with the faces they've only seen on Zoom. These relationships, linking individuals and islands, bears fruit when one community shares an idea, a report, or an expert with another. These relationships are difficult to track and quantify but rank among GLIA's greatest achievements.

An anonymous post-Summit survey was sent to all attendees. Thirty people responded (33% response rate) and the average rating was 9.89 out of 10. People raved about the smooth coordination/logistics, the wide variety of topics they were exposed to, and excellent overall value for the cost. Many offered examples of specific lessons they will be taking back to their islands. Interestingly, one strength of this year’s Summit – the focus on visiting multiple islands – was also perceived as a weakness by some. Many respondents valued seeing all the islands and the informal networking time on the ferries, but also wished for more formal meeting space to dive into specific topics and problem solve.

As GLIA wraps up another highly successful Summit, we look forward to fall 2023 when we will continue the tradition anew. The location and meeting content will be different but the event will serve the growing “community of islands.”



GLIA Project Manager and GLIA Coordinator in heavy contemplation about the future of GLIA as they carefully traverse the shoreline alvar habitat on Kelleys Island. Photo credit: Joe Shorthouse