



**Cover photos:** Landsat 7 satellite image of western Lake Erie Basin and Detroit River corridor provided by USGS Landsat Project; Upper left: angler with walleye (*Sander vitreus*) by Jim Barta; Middle left: lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*) by Glenn Ogilvie; Lower left: *Hexagenia* by Lynda Corkum; Center: lake whitefish (*Coregonus clupeaformis*) by James Boase/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Lower right: juvenile peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) by Craig Koppie/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Bottom left: bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) by Steve Maslowski/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



STATE OF THE STRAIT  
STATUS AND TRENDS OF KEY INDICATORS

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## Preface

Ecosystems change and Lake Erie and the Detroit River are no exception. Some changes are natural, but most are related to past and current human uses and abuses of Lake Erie, the Detroit River, and surrounding lands and waters. Some changes occur on a seasonal basis, while others are observed over a long time frame. During the 1960s, Lake Erie was so polluted that it routinely received national media attention, including an August 20, 1965 article in *Time* magazine which reported that Lake Erie is “dead.”

The media coverage of the pollution of Lake Erie and the public outcry that followed inspired Dr. Seuss to include Lake Erie in the first (1971) edition of *The Lorax*, one of the most well-known children’s books on environmental stewardship. In the 1971 edition of *The Lorax* there was a part where the Humming-Fish no longer could hum because of water pollution and must leave their pond home:

They’ll walk on their fins and get woefully weary  
in search of some water that isn’t so smeary.  
I hear things are just as bad up in Lake Erie.

Ohio State University graduate students, Marjorie Pless and Claudia Melear, wrote to Dr. Seuss in 1987 and informed him of the substantial environmental improvements that occurred in Lake Erie during the late 1970s and early 1980s because of the public outcry and the subsequent governmental response in implementing pollution control programs. Dr. Seuss thanked the students and promised to revise the text in the next edition since he did not want to perpetuate an inaccurate perception about the lake. Accordingly, the 1992 edition of *The Lorax* dropped that last sentence on Lake Erie.

Today, there is no doubt that the ecosystem state of Lake Erie and the Detroit River is better than the 1960s and early 1970s. However, there are also some indicators from Lake Erie and the Detroit River that show declining conditions once again.

This project was undertaken to translate the science behind these indicator trends and bring greater public clarity to our understanding of the State of the Strait. If Dr. Seuss were alive today, there would be no doubt that he would strongly support this Canada-U.S. Detroit River-Western Lake Erie Indicator Project and champion this report to better educate all of us on our responsibility to care for the place we call home!

State of the Strait Conference Steering Committee