

Portage Lakes Management Plan:

A Balanced Approach to Sustaining the Lakes and their Activities into the Future



Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization (NEFCO) October, 2021

NORTHEAST OHIO FOUR COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

Portage Lakes Management Plan

July 19, 2023

This product or publication was financed in part or totally through a grant from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and United States Environmental Protection Agency, with funds from the State of Ohio; and with funds from NEFCO's dues-paying members. The contents and views, including any opinions, findings, or conclusions or recommendations, contained in this product or publication are those of the authors and have not been subject to any Ohio Environmental Protection Agency or United States Environmental Protection Agency peer or administrative review and may not necessarily reflect the views of either Agency, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

This report is submitted in partial fulfillment of Portage Lakes Management Study Task 1, from Appendix 1 of NEFCO's water quality management contract with the Ohio EPA. The scope calls for NEFCO to provide technical support for meetings of the Partners/Portage Lakes Technical Advisory Committee (PLTAC), including topics for initiating management of the Lakes. It was the consensus of the PLTAC that the critical first step was the acceptance of the Portage Lakes Management Plan by the NEFCO governing board. The timeline for the plan roll-out will be determined by the partners following the NEFCO board's action. Discussions with partners and community members have highlighted the importance of increasing awareness, involvement, and public availability of information through various media and experiences, both before and after seeking endorsement from agencies and communities. There are opportunities to collaborate with partners and address efforts/events in a timely way to increase public awareness.

Acknowledgement

This effort has benefited from the participation and support of members, partners, volunteers, agencies, and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which represented many interests. Over five years, the TAC shared their diverse perspectives to develop a mutual understanding of Portage Lakes conditions, processes, priorities, and possible management approaches. The TAC continues to collaborate in exploring and carrying out management measures. Lynn Stamp, of the Portage Lakes Advisory Council, was a driving force that got this effort started. We miss her enthusiasm, insatiable interest in learning, and commitment to a broad-based lakes management effort. She was a great friend of the Portage Lakes. We hope to carry out her legacy in developing a collaborative program to sustain the health and uses of the lakes.

Partners in the field working together to identify priorities and possible management measures in the lakes. The diverse partnership represented many perspectives and fields of expertise. This trip included a lake scientist, citizen activist/Chair of Portage Lakes Advisory Council, ODNR Canal Lands Hydraulics Engineer, and the Mayor of Green. During several such trips, various partners met to observe and discuss conditions in the lakes, causes, and potential management measures. Lynn Stamp is in the stern.



Preface

The Portage Lakes Management Plan (PLMP) is part of a series of studies conducted from 2017 to 2023, funded by grants from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and contributions from member dues. The goal was to develop a management plan that balanced the concerns about dense vegetation in the lakes and protected the health and habitats of the lakes, while supporting the lakes' multiple uses. NEFCO developed the plan and related studies in collaboration with a diverse Portage Lakes Technical Advisory Committee (PLTAC), representing local, county, and state governments, the Portage Lakes Advisory Council, limnological expertise, volunteers, and other interested parties.

The PLMP was developed, finalized, and posted on NEFCO's website in 2020-2021. It includes information from the three previous years of studies, as well as extensive material specific to the management plan. The information in the plan was current when the studies and plan were written and has not been updated since 2021.

The PLMP follows the guidelines of the North American Lakes Management Society for lakes management plans. These guidelines recognize the need to manage lakes and vegetation as interconnected elements in a complex system, with adequate monitoring, limnological expertise, and a coordinated, integrated approach. The plan includes recommendations for developing an integrated lakes management program, including data gathering/monitoring, a coordinated approach, limnological expertise, community involvement, and stewardship. Discussions with the PLTAC built a shared understanding of the complex lakes-watershed system, concerns, priorities, and approaches. The contributions of the PLTAC helped shape and modify the plan.

PLTAC members have expressed interest in carrying out the Plan's recommendations. After some discussion, which was delayed by COVID-related restrictions on public meetings, the PLTAC indicated in May 2023, that they wished to seek public support for the plan and continue on-going efforts to move forward. The PLTAC requested that the NEFCO General Policy Board accept the plan as addressing the goal of developing a management plan that balanced sustaining the lakes' uses with the lakes' health and habitats. After a presentation by NEFCO staff on July 5, 2023, the NEFCO Environmental Resources Technical Advisory Committee recommended that the General Policy Board accept the plan. Staff presented the request to the Board at their monthly meeting on July 19, 2023, and the Board voted to accept the PLMP.

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