

## Lake Erie Water Trail-Cuyahoga County



- **Type:** Water Trail
  - **Length:** 20+ miles
  - **Cost:** \$5,700
  - **Funding Sources:** ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft grant; in-kind design and coordination from Cleveland Metroparks
  - **Date:** May 2019 – July 2021
- Project Leaders/Managers:**  
Cleveland Metroparks, Lake Erie Water Trail – Cuyahoga County Partners, ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft

County: Cuyahoga



Lake Erie is one of Cleveland's greatest natural resources, and it takes a community to protect it for future generations. Realizing that some community members are active users of Lake Erie while others can be intimidated by it, the idea to create a water trail was born complete with educational signage, safety information, and formalized access points. To continue to grow the culture of protecting and interacting with Lake Erie, Cleveland Metroparks initiated the Lake Erie Water Trail - Cuyahoga County Partners group that involved 10 agencies spanning the county line from Huntington Beach on the west to Sims Park on the east. With the desire to create a state designated Ohio Water Trail, ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft was involved. Dedication of the Lake Erie Water Trail is set for July 2021 as part of the Whiskey Island Paddlefest, an event that will continue to connect the community to Lake Erie via a race and try-it kayaking, stand up paddleboarding, and sailing activities.

**Name:** Rachel Nagle

**Phone #:** 440-679-1269

**E-mail address:** [rmb2@clevelandmetroparks.com](mailto:rmb2@clevelandmetroparks.com)

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**The Good Stuff**

- **Amenities:** 13 access points on the trail with varying amenities: parking, paddle access, picnic area, restroom, food, ice cream, water
- **Connections to other assets:** Rocky River at Emerald Necklace Marina, kayak lockers. Cuyahoga River Water Trail at Merwin's Wharf, educational sculpture.

County: Cuyahoga



The Lake Erie Water Trail has 11 designated access points on the actual trail as well as 2 additional access points along the Rocky River and Cuyahoga River Water Trail, each with varying amenities. Through the Lake Erie Water Trail – Cuyahoga County partners group, each agency has agreed to maintain the signage and amenities at each of the access points. That primarily includes Cleveland Metroparks, City of Bay Village, City of Rocky River, and City of Euclid. The excitement this project has generated not only among these groups, but within the entire community has been rewarding as more and more people are excited to engage with Lake Erie, when conditions allow it.

In addition, Kayak Lockers have been added at the Emerald Necklace Marina, which is about a 1 mile paddle to the Lake Erie Water Trail via the Rocky River. This allows community members to store their kayaks or SUPs onsite, which enhances access. Kayak Lockers were added in 2019, and are already sold out for the 2021 season.

Lastly, guests can reach the Lake Erie Water Trail via a 1.5 mile paddle along the Cuyahoga River Water Trail. Freighters among other large vessels frequent this area. The Cuyahoga River Safety Task Force is always looking for ways to enhance education among paddlers and freighters. Thanks to an REI Co-op Grant, Cleveland Metroparks was able to add an artistic sculpture at Merwin's Wharf (picture on next slide) showing the actual size and explaining why thrusters on freighters are dangerous to paddlers as well as showing size comparisons between vessels. Freighters are the length of the height of terminal tower!

The creation of the Lake Erie Water Trail is one of collaboration.

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- **Multi-jurisdictional partnership**, including support from ODNR, worked to create a unified brand and safety messaging
- **Potential to expand** to encompass entire Lake Erie coast
- **LAKE- FOCUSED** paddler safety education, increased access and awareness
- **Environmental Enhancements:** increased awareness = increased stewardship
- **Social Equity:** Access points across the county available to the public. ADA access at Scenic Park and coming to E.55th Marina

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Increased access, education, and programming are the key benefits to the community. Cleveland Metroparks Outdoor Recreation has regularly offered paddling and sailing programs near Wendy Park. With the Lake Erie Water Trail designation, there are plans to expand programming along the trail including short, one-hour try-it paddling programs and paddling tours at Huntington Beach, Wendy Park, and Euclid Creek. Having programs (including low cost try-its that are \$5 for 1 hour) at a variety of locations will increase social equity and help promote a healthy outdoor recreation culture built on safety and education. During the pandemic when in-person programming wasn't possible, virtual programs were offered to promote safe paddling on the water trail:

-Paddling the Lake Erie Water Trail-YouTube clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzE1iRH1Fc>

-Facebook Live: <https://www.facebook.com/ClevelandMetroparks/videos/2867755933353588>

-Skills & Thrills Series: <https://www.clevelandmetroparks.com/parks/education/virtual-learning/outdoor-recreation/skills-thrills-series/skills-and-thrills-paddling-the-allegheny-river-la>

Additionally, many paddling clubs/groups have and will continue to utilize the access points along the Lake Erie Water Trail. With designation, there will be additional safety signage and information for these groups to reference.

Thanks to the ODNR Paddling Enhancement Grant, an ADA accessible kayak launch will be added to E.55th Marina. The creation of the Lake Erie Water Trail led to discussions about applying for grants like these to increase access. There are many more opportunities to continue to extend partnerships and collaborations to enhance the Lake Erie Water Trail, which will continue to provide additional benefits to the community. Some of these ideas are being generated as part of CHEERS (Cleveland Harbor Eastern Embayment Resilience Study), which will provide additional environmental enhancements along the Lake Erie Water Trail in the future.

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Share The River  
@ShareTheRiver

Paddlers arriving at @clevemetroparks Merwin's Wharf on the #CuyahogaRiver will be greeted by this clever sign. When you see Terminal Tower looming in the distance, know a freighter is the same length/height! The bow thruster scale is a nice touch too!



Port of Cleveland and 5 others

County: Cuyahoga



## Buzz on the Street

- Public meetings held in Euclid and Rocky River
- July Facebook Live: 8.3K views, 45 comments, 178 likes
- WKYC Story
- Cleveland.com
- Freshwater Cleveland
- WKSU Story

*"Any time that there's easier and better access to the water is a positive for everyone,"*  
- avid paddler

Since 2019 the Lake Erie Water Trail has and continues to generate positive comments from the community.

WKYC Story: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqS\\_1YotgiQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqS_1YotgiQ)

Cleveland.com: <https://www.cleveland.com/news/2019/08/cleveland-metroparks-working-to-create-lake-erie-water-trail-across-cuyahoga-coast.html>

Freshwater Cleveland:

<https://www.freshwatercleveland.com/features/metroparkswater101019.aspx>

WKSU Story: <https://www.wksu.org/environment-energy/2019-08-23/cleveland-metroparks-begins-planning-on-lake-erie-water-trail>

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## Signage and Brochures

- Educational signage and brochures are a must when developing water trails, especially for the safety of newer users.
- Explain the importance of having proper equipment and knowing how to perform rescues.
- On Lake Erie, particular attention must be paid to dynamic weather conditions

A key aspect of creating a water trail, which can be a different mindset than other trails, is the focus on education and safety based on water conditions. Whether it is on a river or a lake, the wind, waves, weather, and water create an ever changing environment for guests, especially guests newer to paddling. A calm day can be great for all levels of paddlers, but a quick storm as well as windy and wavy conditions and cold water temperatures can turn a fun paddle into a dangerous situation. Educational brochures and signage are essential to creating water trails. Each access point will have a large safety sign as well as mileage makers onsite and directional signage on the roadways to direct paddlers to the trail. A key challenge to the project was determining signage locations/installation methods that would withstand the changing water levels, wind, ice, and wave conditions typical on Lake Erie.