Analysis of the First Five Outdoor Writers
Fall Fishing Invitationals

Ohio Sea Grant Advisory Committees and the Fall Fishing Invitationals for Outdoor Writers

by Jeffrey M. Reutter, Ph.D., director
Ohio Sea Grant College Program

The Northwest Ohio Sea Grant Advisory Committee initiated plans for the first Fall Fishing Invitation for Outdoor Writers during the winter of 1985. Fred Snyder, Jack Wallock and other hard workers on this committee, and the many contributors in the area, deserve all the credit for the great success of this event. Since their development in 1981, the Ohio Sea Grant Advisory Committees have been the strength of the program. No Sea Grant program in the country has advisory committees that can compare.

The National Sea Grant College Program is housed within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) within the Department of Commerce. The goal of Sea Grant is to increase utilization, development and wise management of our coastal resources. This is accomplished through research, education and advisory service or extension. Every coastal state, including Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico, has a Sea Grant program. Since the Great Lakes region is considered our fourth coastline, every Great Lakes state with the exception of Pennsylvania has a Sea Grant program. At least one-third of the total support for individual Sea Grant programs must come from non-federal sources.

Within Ohio, The Ohio State University, as our Land Grant College with a long commitment to research and education on Lake Erie, houses our Sea Grant program within the Center for Lake Erie Area Research (CLEAR). Franz Theodore Stone Laboratory on Lake Erie at Put-in-Bay is also administered by CLEAR. The goal of Ohio Sea Grant is to increase the utilization, development and wise management of our Lake Erie resources. We work to accomplish this through the three Land Grant and Sea Grant components of research, education and advisory service. Our research projects, some of which are funded at other colleges within Ohio, are often applied or problematic in nature and designed to solve problems which are inhibiting the wise development and utilization of our Lake Erie resources.

The Ohio Sea Grant Extension Program within Ohio Cooperative Extension Service includes three full-time District Specialists in Port Clinton, Elyria and Painesville. It is their responsibility to transfer the most recent technological developments to those Lake Erie users needing the information, and identify problems and determine needs for future research projects and/or educational programs.

This task is immense and would be totally impossible were it not for our advisory committees. The development of these formal advisory committees may be our most important accomplishment. Each district specialist was able to get the support and assistance of an influential and energetic group of citizens from his geographic area representing diverse interests in Lake Erie. They are advisory committees but in many ways I consider them "Associate Agents." The functions of the committees are to:

1) legitimize and lend credibility to activities;
2) provide technical and socioeconomic guidance;
3) advise on program and area needs;
4) aid in prioritizing Sea Grant activities;
5) develop local cooperation;
6) evaluate programs and
7) help conclude programs.

The committees are active. The members of the committees are volunteering their time and are doing more than simply rubber-stamping Sea Grant suggestions. Each member:

1) receives information;
2) reviews and responds to proposals;
3) initiates proposals;
4) makes decisions and
5) helps in the execution of activities.

The following is a list of some of the major activities or accomplishments of the advisory committees since their inceptions during 1980 and 1981.

1) They organized and conducted the first and second "Congressional Day on Lake Erie" in June of 1982 and 1983, and the first "State Legislature Day on Lake Erie" in June of 1984. In 1985 they developed a joint "State Legislature/ Congressional Day on Lake Erie," which they have repeated every other year since. These programs allow our elected officials to learn of the value of Lake Erie and personally experience its beauty and richness. They now understand that Lake Erie is not only not dead, but one of the most productive and important lakes in the world.
2) Working with the Army Corps of Engineers, they were very influential in having sand dredged from the mouth of the harbor at Fairport returned to the littoral drift zone where it will reduce erosion east of Fairport. The economic value of this effort is in excess of $1.4 million. Furthermore, the practice has been repeated in Cleveland and is being considered in Sandusky.
3) They have been the major force behind the placement of artificial reefs into the Central Basin of Lake Erie. In this regard, they have located potential reef materials, sources of funding for reef construction and been of major assistance in identifying potential reef sites and obtaining the necessary cooperation of local, state and federal agencies. Permits have been received for five sites and reefs have been constructed at Lakewood and Lorain.
4) They have worked with officials at Camp Perry and A.I.E.S., Inc. to increase fisherman’s utilization of the firing range by improving the system by which notice of firing into the range is transmitted and by reducing the size of the range.
5) They have assisted NOAA Weather Service in the development and implementation of a Marine Reports Program (MAREPS) to improve Lake Erie weather forecasts and make the lake a safer place to boat.

These are but a few of the accomplishments of our Sea Grant Advisory Committees. However, based on their enthusiasm and their ability to serve as catalysts for activity and cooperation within their committees, I expect many more things to come. With their help, Lake Erie will continue to improve and be Ohio’s most valuable natural resource.

Advisory Committees Activities: A Team Effort

by Jack Waldock, chair
Ohio Sea Grant Northwest Advisory Committee

"A Team Effort." No matter which word one chooses to accentuate in this phrase, each would be correct in describing the Fall Fishing Invitational which is held each year by the Northwest Advisory Committee of the Ohio Sea Grant College Program.

The letter "A" signifies that this is one of many programs that have been created by our Sea Grant Committee. How can one choose between the Fall Fishing Invitational and the increasingly popular State Legislature/Congressional Day on Lake Erie?

In an organization, many events are created and run by a handful of people. This is not the case at our annual Fall Fishing Invitational. "Team" is the key word here. As Chairman of the Northwest Advisory Committee, I am proud of the total commitment our members have to our projects. The history of the invitational is a testimony to this.

Six years ago at a brainstorming session, our committee established that one of the problems with Lake Erie fisheries was that many people thought that walleye fishing was only good in June and July, not realizing that opportunities continued into the fall and that motels, restaurants and marinas were still open. To increase publicity, we created the Fall Fishing Invitational.

Our first step was to get a slogan. Since many of the season’s largest fish were being caught from late August on into the early fall, we chose "The trophy season begins in August".

Second, we developed a list of outdoor writers to whom invitations were sent. We now have over 350.

Lastly, we had to have a program. This is where our "team" really shined. When the call went out for charter captains to donate their boats and services for a day or two, a committee member who is the president of a local charter boat association promised to deliver whatever extras we needed. Two other members took care of getting free motel rooms this year, we are promising private room to every outdoor writer and his wife. A bait dealer furnished all the necessary bait. Another member provided the soft drinks and wine. Prizes were important too. Two marine-trade affiliates collected thousands of dollars worth of items to give away. Several years ago, we had an unprecedented turnout which made it obvious—at the last minute—that we had outnumbered our meeting room at The Harbour, a waterfront residential community, that had graciously been our host. How did we solve the problem? One phone call to a member at Cedar Point resulted in a large tent, tables and chairs. His only question was did we want cloth or paper tablecloths.

Further evidence that this event is the product of a "team" is our decision several years ago to ask the Ohio Division of Wildlife to become a cosponsor. Their presence at the Fall Fishing Invitational is appreciated and provides proof that our Sea Grant Program works well with other agencies.

Now, put the accent on "effort". Yes, it is an effort to create something as big as this. The greatest aspect is the mental worry of asking "how will the weather be?". Over the past five years, the weather has not been favorable and the fishing patterns have observably changed.

Is the "effort" worth the results? In total, our committee provides over $23,000 worth of goods and services each year to make this event a success. Success itself is hard to measure. Letters from the writers comment that this is the best program they have attended all year. In addition, there are many immeasurable moments. For example, two years ago we witnessed a southern migration of monarch butterflies as we were drifting for walleye. Many people never see this. There is also the delay in the fall colors which makes the islands so beautiful in autumn. However, the most important benefit is the camaraderie and mutual trust we have created with the outdoor writers. With over 350 writers on our mailing list and 70 attending the invitations, we have built a news pipeline to the public which is available to the entire Sea Grant Program.

Fall Fishing Invitations: Opportunities to Promote Tourism and Public Relations

by Joan Van Offeren, executive director
Erie County Visitors Bureau

and
Karen Culp, executive director
Ottawa County Visitors Bureau

The Ottawa and Erie County Visitors and Convention Bureaus have been involved with the Ohio Sea Grant Outdoor Writer Fall Fishing Invitational since it was established in 1985.

Initially, our involvement centered around the idea of promoting tourism to the area through the articles published by the writers. Another prime reason was the public relations benefits. However, once we had participated in our first invitational, it was evident that this event was also crucial as a cooperative project involving various businesses with a common goal.

Fortunately, we have been surrounded by businesses and organizations which have unselfishly given their time and money year after year to make our event not merely feasible, but a first-class success.

We want to compliment the cooperative efforts of numerous area businesses in hosting past and present Outdoor Writer Fall Fishing Invitations. Sponsored by the Northwest Advisory Committee of Ohio Sea Grant in conjunction with ODNR’s Division of Wildlife, the event provides an opportunity for outdoor writers, editors and others to explore local fall fishing. Now in its sixth year, the program continues to host targeted media contacts to extend the message about our diverse off-season recreational opportunities. The cosponsors have provided the media with complimentary accommodations, charter captain services, meals, gifts and prizes all generously donated by area hospitality and marine industries. Annual contributions exceed $20,000.

The results have been well worth the effort. Our area has been featured in publications in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Virginia and Canada. Through these articles, we have been able to educate the general public on the
outstanding recreational and leisure opportunities available along Lake Erie each autumn. At the same time, the invitationals provide a unique forum to update writers on the progress being made to improve Lake Erie, including any shoreline development.

Proof of this success is the increased volume of phone calls and written requests for information on fall fishing, accommodations and area off-season events that our bureaus have noted.

Advisory Committee: The value to a local business

by Mary Ann Sloan
The Harbour

The Northwest Advisory Committee of the Ohio Sea Grant College Program was formed 10 years ago. In 1985, The Harbour was blossoming into the beautiful condominium, marina and restaurant complex that it is today. Along Ohio Sea Grant and The Harbour shared one common interest—the importance of Lake Erie and the contribution it makes to everyday life.

The Harbour was built on land near the sheltered waters of Sandusky Bay. As part of an agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers, The Harbour agreed to create a 94-acre marsh to compensate for any habitat damage that might have occurred during the construction of our facilities. This new marsh was named the Big Island Wetlands.

A management plan for the marsh was developed by Ohio Sea Grant researchers to ensure that the marsh served multiple purposes. Certain portions were identified for wetland research, other human traffic was restricted. The rest of the area was used for public education and an observation deck was built. The Army Corps of Engineers credited Ohio with "...pioneering a new approach to wetland protection."

One good thing leads to another. Harbour personnel serving on the Northwest Ohio Sea Grant Advisory Board became active on the invitation planning committee. In 1985, when the Advisory Board made the decision to promote fishing and tourism in this area by initiating an Outdoor Writer Fall Fishing Invitation, The Harbour Clubhouse became the base for the event. That year, approximately 18 outdoor writers attended the first invitation. Complementary motel rooms were provided. Charter boat captains donated not only their time and boats, but lures, bait, poles, refreshments and their expertise. Some committee members secured prizes for the largest walleye caught, others put on aprons to cook and serve fresh Lake Erie perch.

Since then, the program has grown in leaps and bounds. The list of writers now stands at approximately 350 and continues to grow. In 1988, the Fall Fishing Invitation was co-sponsored by Ohio Sea Grant and ODNR's Division of Wildlife and we outgrew The Harbour Clubhouse. A member of the Advisory Board from Cedar Point stepped forward and volunteered not only a large tent but tables, chairs, tablecloths, trash containers and the personnel needed to set everything up. The Erie and Ottawa County Visitors Bureaus joined hands to secure motel rooms in both counties to house the attenders and to host the Thursday evening reception. Charter boat captains from these areas volunteered their time and supplies.

The 1990 invitation promises to be the largest one yet. Over 70 writers, spouses and guests will attend in addition to the members and representatives from the cospromoting organizations, area legislators, charter boat captains and personnel from the Erie and Ottawa County Visitors Bureaus.

This Advisory Board is a team, acting together internally and with other agencies at both the state and national levels. The Harbour’s introduction to this special group started with the Northwest Ohio Sea Grant Advisory Board, then moved forward to include the Corps of Engineers (Buffalo District), the ODNR’s Division of Wildlife and many elected officials. We share a love of Lake Erie with all these groups, as well as the vision and foresight to continually strive for its improvement.

Analysis of the value of the invitationals

by Maran Brainard, communicator
Ohio Sea Grant College Program

The invitation list for the Outdoor Writers Fall Fishing Invitation now includes 350 writers from at least eight states and the Province of Ontario. The number of writers that have participated in the invitation each year and the number of articles submitted for consideration as the "best article" follows.

1989 45 writers attended
23 articles were submitted from 14 writers (31%)
2 submitted photographs

1988 48 writers attended
16 articles were submitted from 13 writers (27%)

1987 28 writers attended
12 articles were submitted from 10 writers (36%)

1986 18 writers attended
12 articles were submitted from 8 writers (44%)

1985 27 participants
11 articles were submitted from 9 writers (33%)

It is believed that many more articles were written but not submitted.

For each article submitted, two numbers were obtained to provide a "value" of the invitationals. One is the advertising rate for the publications, the other is the circulation. All of the advertising rates obtained were for 1990; however the value of the advertising was computed (multiplied column inches of the article by rate per inch) for all articles as though they were printed in 1990 and then reduced to more accurately reflect the true cost of advertising in the years the articles were printed. The increases of the national advertising rates for each year were provided by Yannis Takes of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau. NAB stated the national advertising rates increased 5.9% from 1990 to 1989, 7.2% from 1988 to 1986, 7.1% from 1987 to 1988, 7.9% from 1986 to 1987 and 8.6% from 1985 to 1986.

Adjusted advertising value
1985 $7,824.25
1986 2,899.98
1987 30,278.50
1988 15,710.16
1989 7,806.98

TOTAL $64,519.87
Circulation of publications, by year
1985    941,563
1986    542,751
1987    967,522
1988    4,704,540
1989    432,573

**TOTAL  7,588,949**

If the amount of coverage provided by the outdoor writers articles had been paid advertising, the cost of the space over the five years would have been $64,519.87. The circulation of the publications (newspapers, newsletters and magazines) for the articles printed totalled 7,588,949. This does not reflect actual readership since usually more than one person will read a single copy.

Outdoor writers coverage following the Fall Fishing Invitationals