



A new partnership for conservation

What is the region's vision for conservation and restoration of biodiversity? What is the strategy for assuring that biologically important places are protected and life-sustaining ecological functions are maintained? How can the efforts of many groups—park districts, land trusts, watershed groups, and other conservation organizations—be coordinated so all the work happens in the most effective way possible?

The Lake Erie Allegheny Partnership for Biodiversity (LEAP) was formed to answer these questions. First convened by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History in March 2004, the partnership is a voluntary network of more than 30 conservation-related organizations working together to:

- Share information about protecting and restoring the diverse native habitats of the region.
- Increase the capacity of member organizations by establishing programs to aid with recruitment and retention of both paid and unpaid staff, stewardship needs, and biological inventories.
- Promote public awareness and visibility of the region's native plant and animal communities.

LEAP is also working to develop a science-based conservation plan to protect and restore biodiversity in the region. It is envisioned that the plan will identify broad, overarching conservation goals. Individual organizations, based on their own missions and abilities, will then be able to use the information provided within the plan to take actions that support regional priorities. The result should be better coordination, increased collaboration, and more focused and effective conservation.

LEAP is an inspiring example of regional collaboration. To learn more, see the partnership's website at www.leapbio.org or contact the member organizations listed on p. 36.



Map by Western Reserve Land Conservancy

The Lake Erie Allegheny Ecoregion

The geographic focus area of the Lake Erie Allegheny Partnership for Biodiversity (LEAP) encompasses the Lake Plain and glaciated lands and waters south of Canada from Sandusky Bay to the Allegheny Mountains. This includes portions of northern Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and western New York.

This territory has a common glacial history and a climate influenced by Lake Erie. Farther west is the Great Black Swamp region, where the soils become more dominated by limestone outcroppings, making them less acidic. Farther east are higher elevations in the mountains. Farther south, one enters the much rougher topography of the unglaciated Allegheny Plateau.

Conservation planning: Thinking ahead so everyone will be able to experience the incredible richness of nature

In 2005, LEAP members began to explore how to develop a regional plan for conservation and restoration of biodiversity. In addition to accepting responsibility for various planning roles, they agreed that the regional biodiversity plan should:

- Provide a regional vision and strategy for conservation and restoration (i.e., the plan should go beyond conservation of what's left of the region's biodiversity to also include a vision for restoration).
- Utilize a science-based planning methodology to identify and prioritize conservation and restoration objectives.
- Focus on the preservation of overall ecosystem function and resilience but also include individual species of concern.
- Set specific, quantifiable conservation goals and provide a mechanism for monitoring progress.
- Provide a blueprint for conservation action to be carried out by different organizations based on their individual objectives and capacities.
- Integrate relevant aspects of the region's other plans for land use and development, while still retaining its conservation focus.
- Provide a public communication tool about the region's natural heritage.
- Influence decision makers about the threats to biodiversity; inform them of protection and restoration opportunities; and help stop the loss of biodiversity.

LEAP members are now developing this plan to guide their future work. Success will require ongoing consensus building, collaboration, and support from everyone in the Lake Erie Allegheny region.

Lost from the region

- ☞ Bear berry
- ☞ Lynx
- ☞ Mitchell's marsh satyr butterfly
- ☞ Passenger pigeon
- ☞ Piping plover
- ☞ Swallow-tailed kite
- ☞ Timber wolf



Making a comeback

- ☞ Bald eagle
- ☞ Black bear
- ☞ Bobcat
- ☞ Mink
- ☞ Peregrine falcon
- ☞ River otters (improving water quality in the region's rivers has made it possible to reintroduce the river otter.)
- ☞ Snowshoe hare
- ☞ Turkey