

## **Waterfowl Use of Lake Erie Wetlands.**

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Great Lakes coastal wetlands and in particular Lake Erie marshes provide critical staging habitat for waterfowl. Lake Erie coastal marshes receive some of the highest spring and fall waterfowl use of all the Great Lakes wetlands. Long Point Bay in Ontario and Ohio coastal marshes are of particular importance, supporting several million waterfowl use-days each year. While fluctuations in continental waterfowl populations can strongly influence use rates of staging areas, shifts in habitat conditions and food resources can also affect waterfowl migration patterns. Current use trends of Long Point Bay and Ohio coastal marshes by certain waterfowl species cannot be explained by changes in continental population levels and it appears that local biotic processes are affecting waterfowl use rates. In particular, zebra mussel colonization appears to have resulted in increased diving duck use of Lake Erie wetlands. Scaup and bufflehead staging numbers during spring and fall migration have continued to increase despite recent declines in zebra mussel densities. Future trends and information needs will be discussed.