

Lake Erie Amphibians and Reptiles: History, Current Status, and Future Trends.

Richard B. King¹ (rbking@niu.edu) and M.J. Oldman². ¹Northern Illinois University Department of Biological Sciences, DeKalb, IL 60115 and ²Natural Heritage Information Centre (NHIC) Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, P.O. Box 7000, Peterborough, ON K9J 8M5.

The amphibian and reptile fauna of Lake Erie is diverse and includes at least 56 native species (17 salamanders, 11 frogs and toads, 1 lizard, 9 turtles, 18 snakes). Two taxa are endemic to the region: the Lake Erie water snake is found only in the island region of western Lake Erie and the eastern fox snake is found only in a narrow band around parts of Lake Erie and the adjoining Great Lakes. Many amphibians and reptiles of the region have both aquatic and terrestrial phases to their life cycles and thus depend on two or more distinct habitat types. Only the mudpuppy is fully aquatic and completes its entire life cycle within Lake Erie. The distribution and abundance of virtually all Lake Erie amphibians and reptiles have declined in this century. State, provincial, or federal protection has been extended to 12 taxa found near Lake Erie and another 9 have been identified as species of special concern. Habitat loss and environmental contaminants have been major causes of these declines and will continue to impact Lake Erie amphibians and reptiles. Commercial and recreational harvest, intentional destruction, and species introductions have also contributed to declines of some species. Baseline data on distribution and abundance is needed for most species, as is data on habitat requirements and life history. Collection of such data should be combined with the establishment of an array of long-term monitoring sites where standardized census techniques can provide quantitative data on population trends on a regional basis.