



3.0 Interpreting the Seaway Trail

The role of the interpretive plan for the Seaway Trail Scenic Byway is to position the Seaway Trail so that it can tell its stories to visitors. Traditions and themes that will appeal to the target Seaway Trail visitors are identified. Existing and potential interpretive options are identified that present the Seaway Trail's traditions and themes in ways that visitors and residents will find attractive, accessible and useful. Successful Scenic Byway interpretation:

- Builds appreciation and pride among local residents and can motivate residents to become involved in Scenic Byway activities;
- Builds economic and community development by providing information about historic, culture and nature attractions on and off the corridor that are of interest;
- Serves as a marketing tool for the Scenic Byway; and
- Promotes pleasure in the byway itself and motivates communities to provide positive scenic and visual experiences and responsible use of the Scenic Byway.

This Interpretive Plan for the Seaway Trail in Erie County is designed to bring an organized and thematic approach to the Seaway Trail for the better understanding and enjoyment of residents and visitors alike, so that they will have experiences they will enjoy and refer to others, for the economic expansion of the region and for the protection and preservation of the resources associated with the heritage of the region.

This is the story of the place where the sun sinks into the water. The interpretive program for the Seaway Trail in Pennsylvania emphasizes the intrinsic resources related to the cultural, historic, marine, natural and recreational heritage of the Seaway Trail:



The stories of the people of the Seaway Trail are told through interpretive sites like the one above in Presque Isle State Park.

- In the water
- On the water
- Beside the water

The traditions embrace the themes of history and recreation on the Seaway Trail. The following figure illustrates how the traditions and themes relate to one another:

Table 3-1 - Themes and Traditions of the Seaway Trail Interpretive Plan

Themes	Traditions		
	<i>On the Water</i>	<i>Beside the Water</i>	<i>In the Water</i>
<i>History</i>	French & Indian War/ War of 1812	Three Flags/Three Forts	Shipwrecks
	Commerce	Industry	Degradation and reclamation of Lake Erie ecology
	Water transportation system	Land transportation system	Underwater Attractions
<i>Recreation</i>	Swimming	Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Eco-Tourism	Scuba Diving
	Floating/boating/sailing/ice boating	Hiking/biking/walking/skiing	
	Hunting/fishing	Hunting/fishing/ice fishing	

Source: peter j. smith & company, inc.

3.1 History On the Water

3.1.1 French and Indian War/War of 1812

The history of the French and Indian War and the War of 1812 in Erie County began at Fort Presque Isle, established by the French in 1753; it was a sister to Fort LeBoeuf in Waterford, southern Erie County, and Fort Machault in Franklin. Presque Isle played a pivotal role in the War of 1812 as Oliver Hazard Perry's Lake Erie fleet was built here and called this port home. The legacy of these wars extends along the Seaway Trail in Pennsylvania and New York as well as into Ohio, where the Battle of Lake Erie was fought at Put-In-Bay.



Figure 3-1 - Seaway Trail Interpretive Plan Pennsylvania Scenic Byway





In Erie County, this legacy is interpreted at the Erie County Historical Society Museum and the Erie Maritime Museum. The Parade Street Memorial at the foot of Parade Street includes markers for the French, British and US incarnations of Fort Presque Isle and with a map of fort locations; and the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission Historical Markers has a marker at East 6th Street and Parade Streets. Markers and interpretive panels are also on view at the Perry Monument at Presque Isle State Park's Crystal Point and atop bicentennial tower on Dobbins Landing.

Additional interpretive signage would be appropriate at pullovers along the side of the Seaway Trail, offering visitors orientation and direction for additional exploration on and off the Seaway Trail corridor as in the before and after concept illustration for an eastern gateway at the New York line.

An opportunity also exists for interactive interpretation on Presque Isle Bay. This could include historic battle re-enactment, activities involving the Brig *Niagara* and other historic reenactments.



Looking at the City of Erie from Bicentennial Tower. Interpretive signage helps set the context for the historic events that took place on the waterfront in the City of Erie.

3.2 History Beside the Water

3.2.1 Three Flags/Three Forts

The history of the settlement of northwestern Pennsylvania by Europeans is the history of its defense and that history is the history of Fort Presque Isle. There were three Fort Presque Isles. The French established the first, Fort de la Presqu'île in 1753, during the French and Indian War. After establishing their fort, the French built a road to Waterford and established Fort LeBoeuf there. George Washington traveled to Fort Le Boeuf in December 1753 to deliver a letter from the British, ordering the French to vacate the territory. Their refusal to comply touched off the French and Indian War. Fort Duquesne fell in 1758 and in 1759; the French burned both Fort de la Presqu'île and Fort LeBoeuf and fled.

The British fort, like its predecessor, was located at the foot of what is now Parade Street in the City of Erie, about 300 yards from the lake. The British established their presence in 1760, soon after the French fled. They built their fort on the same spot as the French had chosen, but in a different configuration. At the end of the French and Indian War, an Ottawa chieftain named Pontiac led a campaign to reject the British throughout the Ohio Valley. In 1763, the British Fort Presque Isle fell during Pontiac's Rebellion and the British withdrew.

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Native Americans were the sole inhabitants of the area from 1763 to 1795 when the American patriots arrived and established the third fort at Presque Isle. Native Americans apparently established no permanent settlements during the period; the Iroquois had exterminated the Eriez, who had inhabited the area, in 1650. The Americans established their fort atop the bluff overlooking Lake Erie and the only remaining element of any of the three forts remains there today. The General Anthony Wayne Blockhouse is on the grounds of the Soldiers and Sailors Home.

From 2004 to 2010, the 250th anniversary of the French and Indian War will be marked. After that commemoration is likely to be a 200th anniversary tribute for the War of 1812. The Maritime Museum has extensive War of 1812 interpretation, as well as interpretive materials covering all of these conflicts and wars. Likewise, the Erie County Historical Society's Museum has interpretive material including a model of the French fort and related relics. Historical markers are located through the area, including the Heritage Monument at the foot of Parade Street and 6th Street and Parade Street in Erie.

As this plan is being put together in 2005, the time is ripe for the location of new markers and kiosks consistent with those in place along the Seaway Trail in New York with the War of 1812 theme. Additionally, the Erie-Western Pennsylvania Port Authority has proposed a new Overlook Park, trails and passive interpretive opportunities along the bluff. The project is located along the Bayfront Parkway.

3.3 History and Recreation In the Water

3.3.1 Shipwrecks, Underwater Attractions and Diving

There are fully 12 different kinds of craft that lie on the floor of Lake Erie, called the "Graveyard of the Great Lakes." War, treachery, bad weather and poor planning sealed their fates. Two of them, the steamboat *Geo. E. Frost* (sunk 1879) and the sloop *Brighton* (sunk 1829) lie at the bottom of Presque Isle Bay. Scuba diving opportunities abound in the waters of Lake Erie all along the Seaway Trail corridor in Pennsylvania. These sites are known among divers and are catalogued on some websites, notably, <http://www.sportdiverhq.com/erieast.htm>, for experienced and technical divers; and www.aquatic-world.com/ErieWrecks.htm, which presents a list of wrecks and their locations without any information as to their suitability for diving. The David Frew/Amy Marshall map *Ghostships of the South Shore Quadrangle* locates the recorded wrecks since the 18th Century.

Scuba diving is permitted at Presque Isle State Park in designated areas. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources requires that all divers be certified. Dive shops and charter services are available as well. However, there is no central location for interpretation and access to the wrecks. The Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum is an interpretive center in Whitefish, Michigan, housed in a converted lighthouse. The closest combination interpretive and dive centers are in Kingston and Tobermory, Ontario.

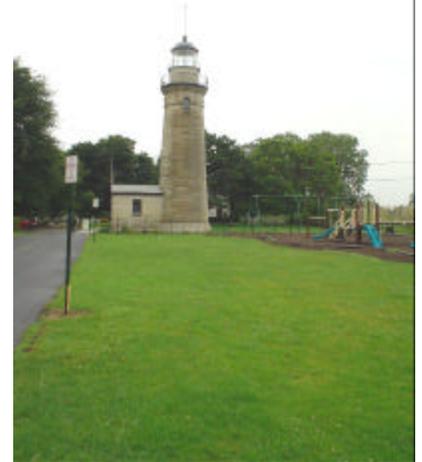
Establishment of an underwater heritage park designed to preserve, protect and enhance the wrecks, as well as a land-based interpretive center and dive headquarters could be a major economic and tourism development tool for the Seaway Trail in Pennsylvania. The center would appeal to the burgeoning heritage tourism market as well as appealing to upscale scuba diving enthusiasts. This concept builds on the history as well as the recreation themes of the Seaway Trail. The Lake Erie Quadrangle has more wrecks than the Bermuda Triangle and is uniquely positioned to build part of its Seaway Trail tourism strategy around this unique opportunity.

3.4 History On and Beside the Water

3.4.1 Commerce & Industry

Commerce and industry on the Seaway Trail in Northwestern Pennsylvania concentrated around the Port of Erie. Mills were also established at the mouths of creeks and the area's favorable climate made larger scale agriculture possible, with grapes the most prominent crop, but other diverse food and nursery crops also were and continue to be produced here. The Lake Erie fishery was also important to the local economy. The City of Erie was the largest commercial fishery on the Great Lakes and fishing tugs were also berthed at Elk Creek, Avonia and Freeport.

Metalworking was prominent in the City of Erie, with an assortment of iron works manufacturing diverse products. Imports to Erie County included general merchandise, metals and ore, lumber and mill products. The chief export was coal.



The Erie Land Lighthouse is one of three lighthouses and light stations established to help guide boats safely through the bay and lake. Still, the area is known for the number of wrecks its waters conceal



As the railroad replaced the steamer, railroad companies bought up the bayfront at the Port, separating the population from the water. Bridging the resulting gulf to reconnect the waterfront and its city has become a major activity of the Port of Erie and the public sector.

Manufacturing interests in the City of Erie included GTE, Hammermill Papers, International Paper, General Electric (GE) and other familiar names. GE established a large manufacturing facility and planned community, Lawrence Park Township, to house its workers. Following the Great Depression and World War II, the center of the nation's economy shifted and Erie County, like the rest of the Northeast, experienced a downturn. The importance of the City of Erie and the Lake to the economy of the nation and the world is interpreted at the Erie Historical Society, which holds a number of collections relative to manufacturing and industry. The Museum of Erie GE History, located at GE, is open to the public; and Lawrence Park also has an historical society. The Erie Maritime Museum is located in a former Pennsylvania Electric Company ("Penelec") generating plant, and one of the five huge generators and the operating panel remains in place.

The agricultural legacy of the lakefront in Erie County is celebrated and interpreted by rural historical societies and museums, including those in North East Township, Fairview Township, Harborcreek and Girard's West County Historical Society. The Erie County Historical Society's Battles Museum of Rural Life in Girard preserves and interprets the agricultural methods and lifestyles of the region from the 1840s to the present.

3.5 History On and Beside the Water

3.5.1 Transportation

Its unique natural harbor in Presque Isle Bay, continuous access and central location on Lake Erie, made the City of Erie a perfect port location. A boat building industry began, with the launching of the *Good Intent*, in 1799 by Rufus Reed. Reed took the step into waterborne transport in order to expand his land-based trading post. Docks eventually replaced early, crude piers, and ultimately wharves replaced docks. So, too, the port embraced the changing technology as wind propulsion was replaced with coal-fired steam and later oil. Eventually, the lakefront at the Port of Erie was home to four centers of shipbuilding and industry: Cascade Docks, East Docks, Dobbins Landing and Reed's Wharf.

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The streams were also important transportation corridors, providing access to the interior of the region. Native Americans' footpaths first became portages and canal beds and later roadways and rail lines. As the automobile became prominent, the centers of commercial activity changed from the city to the suburbs, creating suburban sprawl and focusing economic development on a new front: Downtown revitalization.

The heritage of transportation on the Seaway Trail is interpreted in a number of museums and historical societies throughout the Seaway Trail. Interpretive panels atop the Bicentennial Tower on Dobbins Landing provide context for water transportation through interpretive panels. Shipbuilding continues on Lake Erie in the Port of Erie and the Port Authority maintains a deepwater port. The Bayfront Center for Maritime Studies provides hands-on educational, vocational and recreational programs through boat building and sailing.

The history and traditions of transportation along the Seaway Trail in Pennsylvania including its canals, portages, rails and roads are interpreted throughout the area. The Erie County Historical Society, Erie Maritime Museum and Lake Shore Historical Society in North East Township feature specific transportation-related exhibits.

3.6 History In the Water

3.6.1 Degradation and Reclamation of the Ecology of Lake Erie

The quality of the water of Lake Erie figures large in the heritage of the Seaway Trail. From the time of the first European settlers to the 1960s, the lake was generally viewed ? thoughtlessly ? as an infinite resource. It was a source of fresh water and a dumping ground at the same time. The two uses are incompatible, of course, and were on a collision course with one another. In the late 1960s, Lake Erie was declared a dying lake. Phosphorus, industrial pollutants, oil spills, agricultural runoff and others all conspired together to create a horrifying and revolting scene: because the beaches were foul, vacationers stayed away; fish were less plentiful and diseased; waterfowl were diseased and deformed.

The true nature of the emergency of the ecology of Lake Erie was finally understood and became a priority in the environmental movement. The result is what may have been and continues to be one of the largest water quality reclamation projects in history. The quality of the water has been greatly improved since those times, but concerns continue.

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The ecological emergency and response are graphically interpreted at the Erie Maritime Museum, where an illustrated timeline is featured. To help ensure that history does not repeat itself, the Glinodo conference and educational center of the Benedictine Sisters has a special focus on environmental education and eco-justice including educational programs for children from pre-school through adulthood and related curriculum development.



The water is a major recreation attraction for casual boaters, anglers, swimmers and others. The Erie Bayfront is home to a number of marinas.

3.7 Recreation On and Beside the Water

3.7.1 Swimming/Floating, Boating, Sailing, Hunting & Fishing

Spending time on the water has been a time-honored recreation and relaxation activity and the Seaway Trail offers a unique experience in the many recreation resources of Presque Isle State Park. Sand beaches, swimming, boating and boat tours are all available. While the protected harbor at Presque Isle State Park offers the most-visited and only sand beaches along the Seaway Trail in Pennsylvania, there are other water access points throughout the Trail in Pennsylvania. These include Shades Beach, Halli Reid Park, North East Community Conservation Park, North East Marina and Freeport Beach in the east and Lake Erie Community Park, YMCA Camp Sherwin, Elk Creek, Raccoon Creek and the new Erie Bluffs State Park in the western end. Game is released in the State Game Lands for hunters.

With the decline of industry along the lakefront, access for leisure activities is more important in attracting tourists in order to stimulate the local economy and provide opportunities for community revitalization. The continued recovery of the quality of the water in the lake helps to make these activities attractive to leisure boaters, hunters and anglers. Hunting and fishing are increasingly important to the local economy. While the lake is less prominent as a commercial fishery in Pennsylvania, Lake Erie fish are served in some local restaurants; and bait, tackle and supply shops are information and activity hubs for fishing guides and charters.

The heritage of water access and recreation is not independently interpreted along the Seaway Trail, even though in the Gilded Age, lakefront resorts and amusement parks were numerous. Waldameer Park and Waterworld, founded in 1896, is the only one that remains open and is the fourth oldest amusement park in Pennsylvania and the 11th oldest in the nation. It opened in the 1880s as Hopkins Grove and began as a picnic area with a scenic view of the lake.



3.8 Recreation Beside the Water

3.8.1 Viewing Fauna and Flora / Hiking, Biking, Walking and Skiing

The Seaway Trail in Pennsylvania is a unique and important natural area and a wonderful opportunity for serious and recreational bird and wildlife watchers and plant and tree enthusiasts. It is home to numerous threatened and endangered species of plant and animal. Because the two state parks along the trail, Presque Isle and the new Erie Bluffs, have been inventoried, much is known and understood about the ecosystem here. In Presque Isle State Park, six distinct ecological zones have been inventoried. The region is also on the Atlantic Flyway, the major avian migration route, and more than 300 species have been identified in Presque Isle State Park. The Stull Interpretive and Information Center in the park is a starting point for interpretation and educational programs about the ecology of the park.

The new Erie Bluffs State Park was host to a two-day “bioblitz” in 2004. During the event, 140 scientists descended upon the 540-acre tract to inventory the plants and animals. This inventory will be used in creating a master plan for the park and will contribute to strategies for interpretation, access and education in the park.

Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park (LEAF) offers more than 225 varieties of trees and offers access for passive and active enjoyment as well as educational and interpretive programs.

The Glinodo Center, described above, offers educational programming focusing on environmental educational programming for all ages.

As the waterfront throughout the Seaway Trail turns from industry and toward recreation, efforts are underway to open the lakefront for passive and active recreation. A network of continuous access is available on the waterfront of the Port of Erie, including Liberty Park and Dobbins Landing. Additional access is planned with the bayfront greenway and trails.

A bike path through the Seaway Trail corridor, though on the vehicular roadway, provides multi-modal access. For pedestrians and bikers alike, the Seaway Trail lacks hubs. Gateways at either end of the Seaway Trail, gateways to downtowns along the Seaway Trail, and a hub at Bayfront and State Street with pedestrian focus linking the waterfront to downtown Erie are all opportunities to increase and interpret access for recreation and put the enjoyment of the Seaway Trail in the context of its heritage.

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