

Metroparks of the Toledo Area

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Metroparks Receives Clean Ohio Grant To Purchase Coastal Zone Land
Federal Funds Sought to Complete Park District's Largest Transaction to Date

Metroparks of the Toledo Area has received \$1.7 million from the Clean Ohio Fund and has applied for \$3 million in federal funding toward the purchase of 958 acres of land near Lake Erie in Jerusalem Township.

The purchase would be the largest land transaction in the park district's history.

The Board of Park Commissioners Tuesday approved an application for a \$3 million grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coastal Estuarine Land Conservation Program.

The remaining \$1.3 million of the \$6 million purchase price would come from the Metroparks land acquisition levy.

The property, on State Route 2, is bordered on the east by the Metzger Marsh State Wildlife Area and separated from Lake Erie by the Reno Beach community.

Currently farmland, the property lies within the Lake Erie Coastal Zone, one of the region's most significant ecological areas. Just five percent of the original coastal wetlands remain intact on the Lake Erie shore.

"The coastal zone near Lake Erie was one of the highest priorities when the voters approved Metroparks land acquisition levy in 2003," said Jim Spengler, director-secretary of the 9,000-acre park district. "The Lake Erie marshes; the Oak Openings region; and the Maumee River, Ottawa River and Swan Creek corridors are Lucas County's most important natural assets."

Along with their environmental benefits, coastal wetlands are magnets for wildlife and wildlife-watching tourists.

The region, which includes the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and Magee Marsh State Wildlife Area, is a major feeding, nesting and resting area for migrating birds. It is frequently listed among premier destinations for bird watching in North America.

"This long-term project will create yet another reason for people to experience the Toledo area, bringing their dollars with them," said Melinda Huntley, executive director of Lake Erie Coastal Ohio, a tourism and preservation agency

that manages the new Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail national scenic byway. "Places that embrace our heritage, nature and culture give communities a sense of character, of personality. According to recent research conducted by the Travel Industry Association of America, American travelers are seeking such places.

"Tourism is an \$8.7 billion industry along the lake," said Huntley, who is also president of the Ohio Travel Association. "The longer we keep visitors within our communities, the more they will spend. This new project showcases a part of the Toledo area's story. It will be a welcomed addition to all we have to offer."

There are no immediate plans for the property, which could remain in active farm production for several years.

"The important thing is that it will be preserved as a natural area for future generations," Spengler said.

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