

ISLANDS

Islands along Lake Huron's southeastern shores consist of different ecosystem types. Due to their isolated nature, islands tend to vary drastically in their ecosystems and human presence across the coast. Some islands are the exclusive home to rare species, while others provide a necessary temporary rest-stop shelter for migratory wildlife interspersed with seasonal human homes. Island clusters existing on Lake Huron's southeastern shores include the Oliphant Fishing Islands, Stokes Bay Islands, and Chantry Island. Migratory birds use these islands as stop-over points during spring and autumn, with over 50,000 birds being recorded on some islands during a nesting season. Predominant ecosystem types include bedrock outcrops, sand plain deciduous forests, and wetlands such as swamps and marshes. It is common to see cobble shores, mixed beaches and depositional sand beaches shorelines on island habitats.

ECOLOGICAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY ISLANDS:

- Habitat stop-over points for migratory birds.
- Nesting, breeding, and feeding grounds for waterfowl including Terns, Herons, and Gulls.
- Islands with wetlands, woodlands, and alvars contain the same ecological services as these habitats serve on the mainland.
- Fish spawning and feeding grounds in nearshore adjacent to islands, with the Oliphant Fishing Islands providing one of the most important Whitefish spawning grounds in Lake Huron.

STRESSORS AND THREATS AFFECTING ECOSYSTEM HEALTH:

- Motorized vehicles (e.g. ATV's) used to transport residents from mainland to island residences during low lake levels disturb lakebed sediment and act as carriers of non-native and invasive seed.
- Development for seasonal residences and auxiliary structures including docks degrades ecological integrity.
- Land-use change from development for residential and transportation corridors affect habitat size.
- Invasive species establishing populations on islands threaten the delicate balance of endemic and rare species.
- Nutrients and pathogens from nearby septic systems, roadways, and developments toxify and artificially enrich water surrounding islands.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- 💧 Learn more about what makes islands near you special, and be cognizant of the impacts to these areas.
- 💧 Be mindful when travelling to islands during low lake levels. Limiting the impact of damaging wheels on the lake bottom is important to maintaining healthy nearshore waters when lake levels rise.
- 💧 Habitat clean-ups will ensure garbage and litter is removed which can pose an entanglement or ingestion threat to wildlife.

FUN FACTS

Lake Huron hosts over 25,000 islands, the most of any other Great Lake. The exact number of islands and island groups, particularly small, low lying areas is dynamic and dependent on lake-levels.

Less than 10% of Lake Huron's islands have conservation status or designation, and less than 25% of the highest biological diversity scoring islands are protected, risking habitat area for species at risk and endemic species.

OTHER RESOURCES:

The Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation

www.lakehuron.ca

Social @coastalcentre

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The Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation

BUILD SOMETHING NATURAL:

Fourteen of the islands off the southeastern shores are considered to have high building densities, which directly affects species using these islands for migration, nesting and feeding. Reducing impacts caused by residential and transportation developments will improve habitat for these species.

ISLAND DRIVIN':

ATV's and motorized vehicles should not be used on the lake bed during low levels. Closing any current ATV trails by rerouting them to less-sensitive areas and creating one small transportation corridor to islands with cottages during low levels will reduce the breadth of impact.

INVADERS BEWARE:

Invasive species can disrupt the delicate balance of flora and fauna on islands. Monitoring invasive species presence and treating existing populations will protect natural shorelines and delicate food webs on and around islands.

