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For Immediate Release

September 7, 2006

DEWINE, VOINOVICH AND KAPTUR RECEIVE FIRST LAKE ERIE AMBASSADOR AWARDS

ELYRIA, OH – The Lake Erie Commission today presented its first Lake Erie Ambassador Awards to U.S. Senators Mike DeWine and George Voinovich and U.S. Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur as part of the 2006 Lake Erie Conference at Lorain County Community Center in Elyria. The Ambassador Awards recognize elected officials for their outstanding contributions to Lake Erie.

“Ohio is fortunate to have strong leadership among our Congressional delegation when it comes to protecting and improving Lake Erie,” noted Commission Chairman Sam Speck, who is also director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. “We felt it was time we recognize the consistent, capable, results-oriented efforts of our U.S. Senators and Congresswoman Kaptur to protect the natural resources of the Lake Erie basin and also its recreational and tourism potential.”

In making the award, Speck noted that DeWine is a chief sponsor of the Great Lakes Collaboration Implementation Act of 2006, pending legislation designed to carry out the recommendations of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy released in December 2005. “The goal of the Great Lakes Governors is a long-term, large-scale federal commitment to restoring the Great Lakes, similar to the support Congress has directed to the Everglades and the Chesapeake Bay. Senator DeWine’s bill is an important step toward accomplishing far-reaching restoration of the Great Lakes,” Speck said.

DeWine serves as co-chair of the U.S. Senate Great Lakes Task Force. He was lead sponsor of the Great Lakes Legacy Act, a program to clean up contaminated sediments in Great Lakes tributaries. The largest project in the history of the program (\$50 million) is currently underway in the Ashtabula River. He secured \$5 million to help the State purchase and preserve North Bass Island, and \$2 million to expand Marblehead Lighthouse State Park. Along with Congresswoman Kaptur, DeWine succeeded in funding the purchase of property for East Sandusky Bay Preserve, an important migratory bird stopover. Overall, he has helped provide \$15 million to preserve sensitive ecological areas in the Lake Erie basin, including Mentor Marsh and Old Woman Creek National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Speck said that Senator Voinovich has a history of advocacy for Lake Erie issues going back to his two terms as Ohio’s governor. He was involved in the purchase of land for Villa Angela Park, part of the Cleveland Lakefront State Park system, and helped to establish the Lake Erie license plate, which is the source of funds for the Lake Erie Commission’s grant program. As a member of the Senate

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Environment and Public Works Committee, Voinovich is positioned to support funding for specific restoration projects as well as more comprehensive programs benefiting the Great Lakes. Together with DeWine, he has helped to secure funds for the carp dispersal barrier in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, the last line of defense to keep destructive Asian carp out of the Great Lakes. He was a co-sponsor of the Legacy Act, and has consistently supported the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund that provides low interest loans to communities to manage wastewater problems including combined sewer overflows, a major source of bacterial contamination in Lake Erie and its tributaries. He has been a supporter of the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and an opponent of oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes.

Kaptur has used her position on the House Appropriations Committee to benefit her lakefront district. She has secured funding for the Maumee River Heritage Corridor and for Lake Erie Coastal Ohio, regional organizations promoting nature-based tourism. She is responsible for expanding the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, and for establishing an ongoing project to assess the most effective conservation practices in the Maumee River basin and put them into practice. She also helped the University of Toledo obtain funds to build the Lake Erie Research Center, which focuses on the interface between land use practices and water quality in Maumee Bay and Lake Erie. Recently, Kaptur obtained funds to enable the Department of Defense to locate unexploded ordnance in the Toussaint River; leftover ordnance from the former Erie Army Depot is a concern for boaters on the river.

“Strong support for restoration and conservation programs among our legislative leaders is essential to the future health of Lake Erie, and its ability to support a wide array of outdoor recreational opportunities for Ohioans,” said Speck. “In addition, the programs and land purchases made possible by Senators DeWine and Voinovich and Congresswoman Kaptur also strengthen the tourism value of the Lake Erie coast, already the number one tourist destination in Ohio. The Lake Erie Commission is pleased to recognize their contributions with its first Lake Erie Ambassador Awards.”

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