

19 Dec. 2002

3827 West 133rd St.  
Cleveland, Ohio 44111  
(216) 476-3220

Molly Holt  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
(NOAA) Room 6111  
1305 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Ms. Holt:

I support Ohio EPA's denial of a 401 permit for the Barnes Nursery (dike and channel) dug in Sheldon Marsh wetland complex in July of 2000. The State of Ohio and Firelands Audubon have demonstrated that this action by Barnes Nursery was illegal, not authorized, and non-compliant.

This project has created and will continue to create many adverse coastal effects. The artificial dike of dirt and deep water channel creates a double wall, which alters the natural function of the previously free flowing marsh ecosystem. The hydrology has been altered. Environmental degradation is apparent in the sedimentation, turbidity, pollution from run off of the Nursery's activities, loss of aquatic habitat, and destruction of vegetation which has occurred. Depletion of water to the rest of the wetland complex in low lake level times has occurred, and will cause increased impacts if the dike and channel remain for a fourth growing season.

All the citizens of Ohio own Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve which is adjacent to this destructive project carried out without State or ACOE approval. Sheldon's Marsh is a unique and rare wetland resource within the State of Ohio, as one of the last remaining barrier-beach lagoon Lake Erie Coastal Marshes in the State. It has functions that are significant regionally, statewide, and internationally, including but not limited to migratory waterfowl and neotropical songbird breeding and migratory habitat, excellent foraging habitat for the piping plover and a myriad of other birds and waterfowl; habitat for threatened and endangered plant and animal species, intact natural hydrologic and biogeochemical regimes, and habitat for characteristic Lake Erie coastal marsh plant and animal communities. (Findings of the Ohio EPA Director of Ohio .) It is an irreplaceable resource in the State of Ohio and the actual, continual, and potential degradation by this project **should not be authorized.**

**Construction of the north-south channel on Barnes property was planned and built well in advance of the improper Army permit for the east-west channel. It has no permits on record from the ACE or any state agency, thus making it also inconsistent with Ohio's Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP).**

Restoration to the original condition of Sheldon Marsh wetlands complex is the only option to bring this area into consistency with Ohio's coastal management plan. A dike and a channel in a top rated category III is **not a benefit to the national interest.** Lake Erie is the shallowest of the Great Lakes. Altogether, the Great Lakes contain one-fifth of the earth's standing fresh water. Disruption of the natural water filtration activity of the marsh, necessary to purify our lake drinking water source is a concern. The Clean Water Act intends to protect coast wetlands such as Sheldon Marsh.

**According to the Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan, studies show eco-tourists spend more money than any other type of visitor. The greatest opportunity for future growth along the North Coast lies in developing our cultural and eco-tourism assets. Bird-watching in a coastal wildlife preserve, walking a wetland boardwalk, hiking a park trail or paddling along one of the hundreds of watershed tributaries are all eco-tourism activities.**

**Direct sales from tourism in Ohio's seven Lake Erie counties totaled more than \$1.5 billion in 1996 and supported some 50,000 jobs with a payroll of approximately \$638 million. In Ottawa County alone, eco-tourists spend \$5.6 million annually (p.44). Sheldon Marsh is an important bird watching stop for me and all birders who move from birding hot-spots along the shoreline. Habitat drives species - tell Barnes to restore Sheldon Marsh to its original, pre-construction condition in the interests of the region, the State, the nation and the world.**

Sincerely,

Diana V. Steel  
**Volunteer, Wetland and Water Quality  
Committee: Sierra Club. NEO Group**

cc: Dennis Plank, Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diana V. Steel". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Diana V. Steel

cc