Another Voice: Two events remind us to cherish our beautiful waters

By Lynda Schneekloth

We are such a busy people going to and fro that we don't often think about where we live. Our daily habits consume our time and energy – chauffeuring kids or parents, going to work, grocery shopping, attending a sports event or concert, volunteering, whatever.

Indeed, our lives are full and it isn't often that we take the time to remember that we live on the largest body of surface fresh water on this earth. But two events last week are a wake-up call and the opportunity to give thanks for the blessings of our home.

The first announcement was made on a very windy September Monday morning at the Bell Slip at Fuhrmann Boulevard, where the Our Outer Harbor Coalition announced a proposal to designate the entire Outer Harbor a state park. The land along the Lake Erie shoreline, formerly a port, was constructed with fill dredged from the Buffalo River that has transformed itself after years of neglect with emerging habitats.

Citizens have discovered the newly developed recreational and nature opportunities and the beauty of sunsets over Lake Erie. The proposal reminds us that this is home to at least 40 native species of fish, on the migration path of the monarch butterflies that came by the hundreds this year, and hosts 240 species of birds, more than any other place on the Great Lakes.

The area is also rich in our industrial history with the Buffalo Lighthouse, two grain elevators and the 1920 Ford plant. The park designation would safeguard for our children the beauty, vitality and diversity of Buffalo's Lake Erie shore, our Emerald Coast.

At the same time, the Niagara River received an international designation on Oct. 3 as a “Ramsar Wetland of International Importance,” joining 40 other U.S. Ramsar sites as prestigious as the Everglades, the Chesapeake Bay Estuary and San Francisco Bay.
This river corridor not only houses the largest energy producer in New York State, but supports at least 338 species of birds, 100 species of fish and other amazing wildlife, particularly in the Niagara Gorge.

The Niagara River is especially known for water birds with 120,000 recorded on a single day. Many of these birds are using the Niagara River corridor for migration along the North American Flyway – traveling from Latin American to the Arctic and back each year, stopping here for a rest and food before continuing their yearly journey.

The Ramsar designation calls us to remember the rich biodiversity of the Niagara River. So occasionally, stop and think of how special our place is or better yet, go and visit all the newly opened public places along the Niagara River, the Buffalo River and the Outer Harbor. We are blessed with beautiful waters.

Lynda Schneekloth is a member of Our Outer Harbor Coalition and the Ramsar Steering Committee.

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