

Lake Erie Law Enforcement: A Busy Year in 2024

The Division of Wildlife's Lake Erie Law Enforcement team had an eventful 2024, staying active in their efforts to uphold regulations and ensure fair play for all fishing, hunting, and trapping activities. Throughout the year, the team made over 9,000 license checks, issued 351 tickets, and delivered nearly as many warnings. Their dedication extended to monitoring commercial fishing activities through 254 Commercial Fishing Activity Reports, which documented encounters such as dockside checks, wholesale market inspections, and transportation truck evaluations.

The rise of ice fishing in early 2025 contributed to an uptick in guide licenses issued, with 985 licenses compared to 954 the previous year. However, despite these numbers, enforcement officers uncovered instances of individuals operating as unlicensed guides, charging four suspects for the offense.

A Noteworthy Unlicensed Guide Case

Among the unlicensed guide cases, one stood out for its audacity and complexity. This case involved a fishing guide who had advertised their services despite being unlicensed for several years. Undercover officers embarked on an investigation, booking trips with the suspect in both 2023 and 2024. Although the 2023 trip was canceled due to boat trouble, officers succeeded in going on a four-person fishing trip in 2024.

Lake conditions during the trip were less than ideal, but the fishing turned out to be exceptional. However, what unfolded during the trip was more than the officers expected. When the undercover officers reached the limit of 30 walleye, the suspect directed them to sort the smallest fish into a bucket and place an ice bag on top. The suspect continued to set lines and troll, ultimately keeping 12 walleye more than allowed.

Uniformed officers awaited the group at the dock, charging the suspect with guiding without a license, failure to display a sticker, and exceeding the daily walleye limit. In court, the defendant was found guilty of guiding without a license and exceeding the walleye limit, though the sticker charge was dismissed. The penalties included a \$200 fine, \$600 restitution for the 12 extra walleye, and \$275 in court costs. The guide also received no payment for the trip.

Commitment to Service

The Lake Erie Law Enforcement team's diligent efforts throughout 2024 reflect their unwavering commitment to protecting natural resources and ensuring compliance with regulations. Through their work, they not only uphold the integrity of fishing, hunting, and trapping activities but also send a clear message to violators that such actions will not be tolerated.

By Matthew Leibengood, Lake Erie Law Enforcement Supervisor, Ohio Division of Wildlife *with assistance from Microsoft Copilot, an AI tool, to analyze and synthesize provided content, 04.22.2025.*