

How Many Islands Are There in Lake Erie?

There are at least 36 “real” islands in Lake Erie, but an exact count depends on what you decide to include or exclude. The four types of islands that cause a counting problem are

- Islands that existed in the 19th century but are now either connected to the mainland or submerged, e.g., Catawba Island, Gull Island, Long Point Island
- Islands not quite in Lake Erie such as Johnson’s Island in Sandusky Bay or Bois Blanc Island at the mouth of the Detroit River
- Artificial islands, such as the ones that the Southeast Shoal Lighthouse off Pelee Island and the Detroit River Light sit on.
- A large number of tiny unnamed islands, mostly off the Michigan shore and off Long Point, Ontario

So the exact count of islands is at the reader’s discretion. But here are the islands to consider. Groups 1 and 3 below contain the 36 “real” islands in Lake Erie. If you take out the three that are now permanently connected to the mainland (Catawba Island, Presque Isle and Long Point Island), the count goes down to 33. Groups 2 and 4 contain 9 other islands that are sometimes mentioned as Lake Erie Islands, even if incorrectly.

The names of all 23 of the islands in the Bass Island Archipelago are in boldface. These are all 14 in Group 1 and 9 in Group 3.

Group 1: The 14 Core Ohio Islands: Ohio’s Bass Island Archipelago in Ottawa and Erie Counties

Island	Inhabited?	Comments
Ballast	YES	Small island with 9 homes and no scheduled ferry service. Former summer HQ of the U.S. Canoe and Kayak Association
Buckeye	NO LONGER	Small; Known to have had one home in the past
Catawba	YES	Originally a real island, now permanently connected to the mainland
Gibraltar	YES	Small; Provides protection for Put-in-Bay harbor on South Bass
Green	NO LONGER	Small; Previously inhabited by a lighthouse keeper
Kelley's	YES	Large & well developed; The only Group 1 island in Erie County
Lost Ballast	NO	Not much more than a reef with a few trees
Middle Bass	YES	Large and well developed, but only half the size of South Bass
Mouse	NO LONGER	Small; Known to have had one home in the past
North Bass	YES	Large & not well developed; owned 80% by the State of Ohio
Rattlesnake	YES	An exclusive private club with about 15 home sites
South Bass	YES	Large & well developed. Where Put-in-Bay is located
Starve	NO	A small, bare and dangerous reef off South Bass Island
Sugar	YES	Small with a handful of homes; Now separate; connected to Middle Bass on some early maps

Group 2: 4 Other Ohio “Island” Candidates in Ottawa and Erie Counties

Island	Inhabited?	Comments
Cedar Point	YES	In Erie County. Sometimes mentioned as a former island, but the historical record is less clear on this than about Catawba Island.
Gull	NO	Listed on 19 th century maps as a separate island between Middle Island and Kelleys, this island is now just an underwater shoal
Johnson’s	YES	In Sandusky Bay close to Lake Erie and connected to Marblehead Peninsula via a bridge, but not really in Lake Erie
Kafralu	NO LONGER	This artificial island built on a sandbar off Cedar Point had ten buildings on it. Built in 1911 by Louis E. Wagner near the entrance of Biemiller Cove, it was sold to the Cedar Point Company in the 1930s and extended to be part of Cedar Point. The name is from his wife Katherine and his sons Frank & Louis .

Group 3: The 22 Other Core Islands in Lake Erie

Island	State/ Prov.	Inhabited?	Comment
Turtle	OH, MI	YES	Half in OH (Lucas County) and half in MI
West Sister	OH	NO LONGER	In Lucas County. Extensive agriculture in the 19 th century.
Gard	MI	NO (but see comment)	Known to have been inhabited by Indians, but never by settlers. Close to Toledo, OH
Indian	MI	NO	Close to Toledo, OH
Stony Point	MI	NO	Close to Toledo, OH
Presque Isle	PA	YES	Originally a real island, now permanently connected to the

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			mainland
East Sister	ON	NO LONGER	Extensive agriculture in the 19 th century
Hen (and Chickens) (4)	ON	YES (Hen only)	We count these as 4 islands, even though 3 are not much more than reefs. The “chickens” are Big Chicken, Chick and Little Chicken Islands. Hen Island has been the home of the private Quinnebog Club since the 19 th Century.
Long Point	ON	YES	A large real island in the 19 th century, now permanently connected to the mainland and a World Biosphere Reserve. Near Port Dover. There are many small islands off Long Point Island, but only three (Ryerson’s, Second, Snow) have distinct names on most maps.
Middle	ON	NO LONGER	Previously inhabited. The southernmost point in Canada, 7 miles east of Middle Bass Island
Middle Sister	ON	NO LONGER	Extensive agriculture in the 19 th century
Millionaire’s	ON	YES	Not named on any maps, this is an island known to many locals of the Long Point area as a very exclusive private hunting preserve. An island presenting a significant barrier on Long Point to the entrance to a large private marsh behind it, this is where the Duponts used to go duck hunting 100 years ago, and is still a very exclusive private club. It is southwest of Ryerson’s Island.
Mohawk (formerly Gull Island)	ON	NO LONGER	Off Lowbanks, near the Welland Canal. Site of historic lighthouse ruins. In the 19 th century, there were 2 islands in Lake Erie named “Gull”.
North Harbor	ON	YES	The only Lake Erie Island today with just 1 private house and nothing else.
Pelee	ON	YES	The largest Canadian island in Lake Erie.
Rock	ON	NO	A tiny island the size of the Chickens, about 6 miles east of Mohawk Island near Port Colborne.
Ryerson’s	ON	YES	Off the N. shore of Long Point Island. Named after the first owner, Joseph Ryerson, who was a Loyalist sniper in New Jersey with a unit that tried to kill George Washington.
Second	ON	NO	Off the N. shore of Long Point Island
Snow	ON	NO	Off the N. shore of Long Point Island

Group 4: 5 More Island Candidates for Lake Erie

Island	State/Prov.	Inhabited?	Comment
Bird	NY	NO	Shown on a few 19 th century maps, this was in Lake Erie near the mouth of the Niagara River. Not on current maps.
Bois Blanc	ON	YES	Technically in the mouth of the Detroit River, but with a great view of Lake Erie and very close to it.
Detroit River Lighthouse	MI	YES	Artificial island in Lake Erie south of the mouth of the Detroit River. Sometimes incorrectly referred to as a replacement for the Bar Point Lightship that was about two miles north of this lighthouse for many years.
Little Sister	ON	NO	There are several historical references to a Little Sister Island in Lake Erie. It is not clear whether these refer to (a) West Sister Island, (b) Little Sister Island in the Maumee River in Toledo, but definitely not in Lake Erie or (c) some shoal not on current maps.
Southeast Shoal Lighthouse	ON	YES	Artificial island in Lake Erie off Point Pelee, built for the lighthouse there. Supported by a lightship before the lighthouse was built. It has a helipad on the roof.