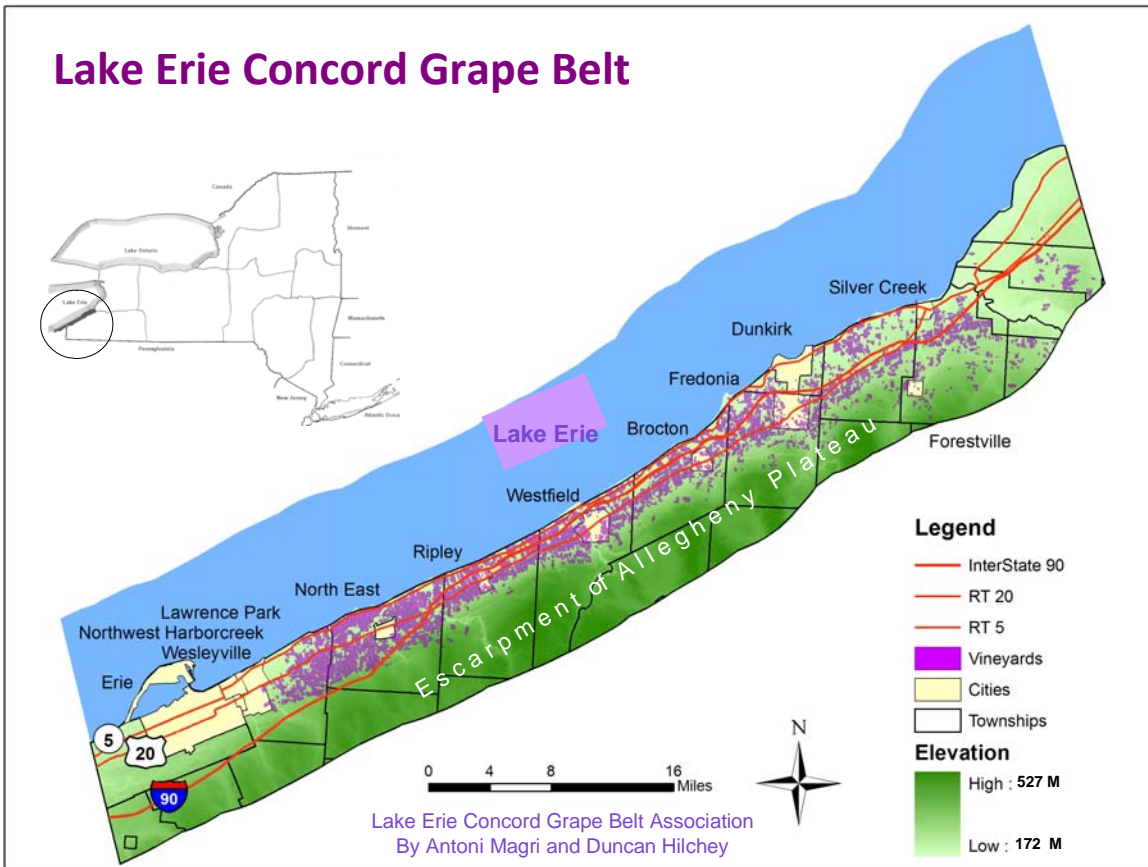




The Lake Erie Concord Grape Belt: The Great Lakes Region’s First Agricultural Heritage Area

Summary

The Lake Erie Concord Grape Belt is the largest viticultural area in North America outside of California, encompassing a 30,000-acre swath of grapes that runs the length of eastern Lake Erie. It is where the Welch family launched America’s first commercial, nonalcoholic fruit beverage industry. Today it is home to several dozen juice processing plants and wineries and 800 vineyards that together generate over \$700 million each year in total regional economic impact (within Chautauqua County, NY, and Erie County, Penn.).



Interested in capitalizing on the untapped community and economic development potential of the Concord Grape Belt, a consortium of local governments and development groups in Western New York and Pennsylvania (with assistance from Cornell University) established the Lake Erie Concord Grape Belt Heritage Association, Inc., with the mission of establishing a New York State Heritage Area. New York State Heritage Areas are designated by the state legislature and provide resources and promotion of historically

or culturally significant places and landscapes. In December 2006, the Lake Erie Concord Grape Belt became the nineteenth heritage area in New York State—and the first state agricultural heritage area in the United States.

A key goal is to establish an automobile interpretive trail with information kiosks and grape related destinations. To support this work, the Concord Grape Belt Heritage Association partnered with the city of Dunkirk (in Chautauqua County) to secure a \$75,000 grant from the NYS Coast Resources Improvement Program (NYSCRIP). The Association successfully argued that the Concord Grape Belt is a coastal resources since it owes its existence to the meliorating effects of Lake Erie's climate, which provides a long growing season in the fall and a cool spring season that slows leaf budding until the danger of frost has passed. This weather, combined with the unique soil conditions created by ancient lake deposits, have created a unique "terroir" (combination of climatic and edaphic conditions) for the commercial production of Concord grapes. Additional accomplishments of the Concord Grape Belt Heritage Association include a promotional DVD, a "Culinary Bounty" program to promote local grape cuisine (including a special label certifying the origin of Grape Belt products), and support in the establishment of state-of-the-art grape production research facility.

Implementing Agencies

- New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation
- New York State Department of State: NY Coastal Resources Interpretive Program (NYSCRIP)

Authorizing Legislation

- Heritage Areas: Article 33 of the Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law of New York State.
- NYSCRIP: Title 11 Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, New York State Department of State, Coastal Resources Program

References

Lake Erie Concord Grape Belt Heritage Association

- Website: www.concordgrapebelt.org
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