

OHIO STRENGTHENS EFFORTS TO FURTHER PROTECT LAKE ERIE

Lake Erie is one of Ohio's crown jewels. In addition to supporting Ohio's travel and tourism industry and significant economic development opportunities along the shoreline, Lake Erie is a source of drinking water for 23 public water systems serving approximately 2.6 million Ohioans. Over the past four years, Ohio has made significant progress in protecting the lake, including:

- Restricting water volumes that can be diverted out of Lake Erie's watershed;
- Enacting new regulations on fertilizer application to reduce the nutrient runoff that contributes to algal blooms;
- Reducing open lake dumping of Maumee River dredge material and prohibiting it for Cuyahoga River dredge material;
- Banning oil and gas production under Lake Erie; and
- Helping combat invasive species via mutual aid agreements with nine other Great Lakes states and Canadian provinces.

Now Ohio will build on these efforts with additional initiatives that help provide those on the front lines of the battle to protect Lake Erie with the tools and funds they need to better protect the lake, and ensure that the protections Ohio has already created are as effective as possible.

\$150 Million in No-Interest Loans to Protect Water Quality

Ohio will make available more than \$150 million in grants and loans over the next year to help public water systems keep drinking water safe, improve their facilities and reduce the amount of phosphorus they discharge into the Lake Erie watershed. Ohio has sought and received approval from the U.S. EPA to expand the ways that existing sources of funds can be used to address the most pressing needs.

- **\$100 Million in Zero-Interest Loans to Help Reduce Phosphorus**: Ohio EPA will make available \$100 million in zero-interest rate loans to local wastewater systems for equipment and facilities that reduce the levels of phosphorus and other pollutants. Preference will be given to public wastewater treatment plants in the Lake Erie watershed or a watershed where Ohio EPA has identified that phosphorus is excessive.
- **\$50 Million in Zero-Interest Loans for Drinking Water Plants**: Ohio EPA will make available \$50 million in zero-interest rate loans to local drinking water plants for upgrades and back-up water sources. Preference will be given to water systems in the Lake Erie watershed and those that have experienced an algal bloom or a detection of toxins. Qualifying projects include components that treat for toxins produced by harmful algal blooms, as well as projects that implement avoidance strategies such as interconnections with other water supplies, new elevated storage facilities and installation of alternative sources of water.
- **\$1 Million in New Grants for Public Water Systems**: Ohio EPA will make available \$1 million in grants to local public water systems to obtain the laboratory equipment, supplies and training needed to test for microcystin and other cyanotoxins that are products of algal blooms. Public water systems that use a surface water source are eligible for the funding, up to \$10,000 per system.
- **Reinforcing Testing Protocols**: Ohio EPA is reconfirming with all Ohio water systems that their testing protocols for microcystins are those approved by the state, the U.S. EPA and the main testing-equipment manufacturer.
- **Testing and Training Support**: Ohio EPA will train staff at any local public water system on appropriate testing protocols and conduct testing for public water systems that do not have that capability.

New \$1.25 Million Lake Erie Nutrient Reduction Program

A new \$1.25 million conservation program will help farmers implement best-management practices that reduce nutrient runoff from fields, improve water quality and combat harmful algal blooms. The program will be operated through the Ohio Clean Lakes Initiative, which has already helped protect more than 40,000 acres in northwest Ohio. The Ohio Phosphorus II Task Force report highlighted cover crops and controlled drainage structures as especially effective strategies for managing nutrients, and these practices will be targeted by the new \$1.25 million effort. Cover crops improve soil health and decrease runoff, and some crops even store nutrients in the soil, thereby reducing the need for as much fertilizer in the spring. Controlled drainage structures and blind tile inlets are also especially effective as they reduce runoff and result in less nutrient loading into the watershed.

- **Nearly 30 Counties Could Benefit from the New Program:** Grants will be available to Allen, Ashland, Auglaize, Crawford, Defiance, Erie, Fulton, Hancock, Hardin, Henry, Huron, Lucas, Lorain, Marion, Medina, Mercer, Ottawa, Paulding, Putnam, Richland, Sandusky, Seneca, Shelby, Van Wert, Williams, Wood and Wyandot counties. Starting immediately, producers in these counties can sign up for this program and are encouraged to contact their local Soil and Water Conservation District for more details.

\$2 Million in Research Funds

The Ohio Board of Regents will make available up to \$2 million for Ohio institutions to conduct further research into the life cycle of algal blooms to help Ohio better combat them.

More information about Ohio's nutrient management efforts can be found at:

<http://www.epa.ohio.gov/Portals/35/wqs/NutrientMangementInitiatives.pdf>

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