

*Alliance for the Great Lakes • Environmental Defence Canada • Environmental Law & Policy Center
Freshwater Future • Lake Erie Charter Boat Association • Lake Erie Improvement Association
Lake Erie Waterkeeper • The Nature Conservancy – Ohio • National Wildlife Federation
Ohio Environmental Council • Sierra Club – Great Lakes*

Groups Call for Healthy Lake Erie Free from Harmful Algal Blooms

(Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2015) Washington, DC – The Great Lakes Commission, an interstate agency with representatives appointed by the governors and premiers of all Great Lakes states and provinces, meets today in Washington, DC about six months after nearly 500,000 residents of the Toledo area faced a drinking water ban lasting more than two days because a massive toxic algal bloom made water from Lake Erie unsafe to drink.

Even though the region is firmly in winter's grip, spring is on its way and the same factors that lead to the toxic algal blooms each summer in western Lake Erie will return once again. Even more concerning: thanks to previous damage to the lake, the impacts of invasive zebra and quagga mussels that exacerbate pollution problems, and the effects of a changing climate, the nutrient problem will likely get worse if we do nothing.

It is unacceptable that Lake Erie has been polluted so significantly that drinking water for approximately 11 million Americans and Canadians is at risk. Fortunately, this problem is not out of our control. It is preventable.

Report after report by leading university researchers and government agencies shows that the science is clear: dissolved phosphorus from agricultural runoff is driving the resurgence of harmful algal blooms. We call on the governors and premiers to commit to at least a 40 percent reduction in phosphorus, with an emphasis on reducing agricultural sources. This reduction commitment must be accompanied by a clear timetable with a firm deadline, clear milestones, and a monitoring plan to measure progress and help agencies adjust programs, if needed, to ensure deadlines are met.

Starting tomorrow, residents from around the region head to Capitol Hill as part of the annual Great Lakes Days to call on Congress to fund important programs that would help reduce farm field and urban runoff into the lakes. We will be voicing our support for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, State Revolving Funds to stop sewer overflows and improve wastewater and drinking water infrastructure, and regional Farm Bill conservation funds. These programs are an important part of efforts to reduce phosphorus flowing into the Great Lakes and around the country. But much more needs to be done.

The Great Lakes region has come together again and again in a uniquely bi-partisan manner to do what is right for the lakes. And, we can do it again. Until our lakes are free of harmful algal blooms, our economy, drinking water and way of life are in jeopardy. The time for action is now. The health of our lakes and our region depend on it.

###

For more information contact:

Jennifer Caddick, Alliance for the Great Lakes – jcaddick@greatlakes.org, (312) 445-9760

Kristy Meyer, Ohio Environmental Council – KMeyer@theoec.org, (614) 638-8948

Jill Ryan, Freshwater Future – jill@freshwaterfuture.org, (231) 348-8200

Frank Szollosi, National Wildlife Federation – szollosif@nwf.org, (734) 660-5657

Jen Mayville, Environmental Defence Canada – jmayville@environmentaldefence.ca, (905) 330-0172

Adrienne Dziak, The Nature Conservancy - Ohio – adziak@tnc.org, (614) 717 2770 Ext. 125

Madeline Fleisher, Environmental Law & Policy Center – mfleisher@elpc.org, (857) 636-0371

Paul Pacholski, Lake Erie Charter Boat Association – (419) 340-0076

Melissa Damaschke, Sierra Club – Great Lakes – melissa.damaschke@sierraclub.org, (313) 965-0055

Sandy Bihn, Lake Erie Waterkeeper & Lake Erie Improvement Association – Sandylakeerie@aol.com, (419) 367-1691

«Email»