

***Alliance for the Great Lakes · Canadian Freshwater Alliance · Environmental Defence
Canada Freshwater Future (U.S. and Canada) · Michigan League of Conservation Voters
Ohio Environmental Council***

Lake Erie algal bloom forecast: not a cause for celebration, cautions environmental groups

(July 7, 2016) - Earlier today, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) forecasted a mild to moderate algae season in the western Lake Erie basin this year, which typically lasts from July through mid-October. The forecast was announced this morning at a briefing at Ohio Sea Grant's Stone Laboratory on Gibraltar Island. Environmental and conservation groups issued the following statement in reaction to the forecast announcement:

“While the NOAA forecast calls for a mild algae season on Lake Erie this summer due to an unseasonably dry spring, the news is not cause for celebration. Nevertheless, it may provide some respite for the nearly 11 million people that receive drinking water from Lake Erie as well as those who boat, fish and recreate on the lake, all who have felt the impacts of several years of near-record breaking harmful, and at times toxic, algal blooms.

Communities and businesses cannot count on dry weather to solve the problem. To protect our drinking water and ensure safe, clean beaches, significant reductions in agricultural pollution, the main cause of harmful algal blooms, are needed. Agricultural pollution occurs when rain and snowmelt flush excess fertilizers and manure off farm fields and into streams and rivers. Those streams then carry the nutrient-rich fertilizers and manure into Lake Erie where they end up feeding the growth of algae rather than the crops for which they were intended.

While Ohio, Michigan and Ontario have taken some steps to reduce phosphorus, much more needs to be done to stem the tide of algae-causing pollution flowing into Lake Erie. One year ago, the states and province committed to a 40 percent phosphorus reduction to improve water quality in Lake Erie and earlier this year, Ohio and Michigan released their plans to meet this commitment. Unfortunately, those plans are inadequate and we are still waiting to see Ontario's plan.

Michigan, Ohio, and Ontario need to do much more to solve the problem through the regional solutions that are currently under development. Earlier this month, environmental and conservation organizations provided detailed [recommendations](#) to Environment and Climate Change Canada and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, encouraging the governments to do more than rely on the same approaches that have failed to protect Lake Erie in the past. The groups recommend that each state and province along Lake Erie develop plans that include:

- A comprehensive monitoring program and the use of modelling that tracks progress and directs an adaptive management strategy;
- Adequate and long term funding for science and solutions;

- Proactive compliance and enforcement mechanisms to ensure existing rules are being followed;
- Specific programs and policies, which include common-sense regulations on farming practices; green infrastructure to reduce stormwater; upgrading and fixing failing home septic systems; and ratcheting back of phosphorus discharges from wastewater treatment plants. Tactics should be implemented in proportion to the contributing sources and emphasize achieving significant reductions from the agriculture sector; and
- Working with the public to develop and implement solutions to reduce phosphorus by 40 percent.

We cannot just cross our fingers and hope for dry weather to ensure a healthy Lake Erie. We strongly urge the U.S. and Canadian governments to move quickly to create effective, real world plans for reducing agricultural pollution.”

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