

Alliance for the Great Lakes – Lake Erie Charter Boat Association – Lake Erie Waterkeeper  
National Wildlife Federation – Ohio Environmental Council

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## **Groups to EPA: Put Lake Erie on Pollution Diet to Curb Harmful Algal Blooms, Protect Drinking Water**

COLUMBUS, OHIO (October 22, 2015) – More than one year after a harmful algal bloom in western Lake Erie poisoned the drinking water for more than 400,000 Toledo-area residents, advocates for the lake are asking the U.S. EPA to put in place a pollution diet for western Lake Erie to prevent future outbreaks. The groups are asking the EPA to declare western Lake Erie as “impaired,” a designation under the Clean Water Act to limit algal-bloom-causing pollution into the Lake.

The call for action comes following the refusal of both the Ohio EPA and U.S. EPA to apply tools under the Clean Water Act to help improve the health of western Lake Erie, despite the recurrence over the last decade of harmful algal blooms that have poisoned drinking water, closed beaches, and hurt other recreational uses such as fishing.

“EPA has failed in its duty to protect Lake Erie and the people and wildlife which depend upon it,” wrote conservation groups in a letter sent today to U.S. EPA Water Division Director Tinka Hyde. The letter continues: “Waiting yet even longer for the designation of declaring the western basin of Lake Erie ‘Impaired’... is unacceptable.”

Read the letter at: <http://bit.ly/1RqnR4Q>

Listing a water body as “impaired” under the Clean Water Act triggers an assessment to determine where pollutants are coming from and in what amounts—information that is then used to create a pollution diet to help restore water quality. The onus is on the states to follow the recovery steps to make sure pollution reduction goals are met.

The vexing problem of harmful algal blooms in western Lake Erie prompted the International Joint Commission, the U.S.-Canadian body responsible for advising both countries on managing and protecting the Great Lakes, in 2014 to recommend designating western Lake Erie as “impaired” under the Clean Water Act and putting it on a pollution diet to curb excessive runoff pollution that scientists say is the No. 1 cause of harmful algal blooms.

Runoff occurs when rain and snowmelt wash excess fertilizers and manure high in phosphorus off farm fields and into rivers, streams and ultimately inland lakes and Lake Erie, where they feed explosive algal growth that can poison drinking water, harm fish and wildlife, and hurt recreation and tourism. Runoff pollution from cities, failing septic systems, and sewage overflows also contribute to harmful algal blooms.

Using Clean Water Act tools to protect drinking water in western Lake Erie will help the region meet a commitment made in June by Ohio Gov. John Kasich, Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder and Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne to reduce algal-bloom-causing phosphorus in Lake Erie by 40 percent by 2025.

Signatories to the letter include the Alliance for the Great Lakes, American Rivers, Environmental Law & Policy Center, Freshwater Future, Izaak Walton League of America, Lake Erie Waterkeepers, Lake Erie Improvement Association, Lake Erie Charter Boat Association, National Wildlife Federation, and Ohio Environmental Council.

Commenting on the letter, groups said:

“Lake Erie is sick and needs to be put on a solid recovery plan,” **said Frank Szollosi, Manager of Regional Outreach Campaigns for the National Wildlife Federation.** “The EPA can no longer kick the can down the road. It is a vital partner and needs to use its authority under the Clean Water Act to accelerate the recovery of Lake Erie to protect our drinking water, jobs, health, fish and wildlife, and way of life.”

“The U.S. EPA should act now and declare Western Lake Erie ‘impaired’ so we can begin the TMDL assessment,” **said Lucas County Commissioner Carol Contrada.** “Adding the open waters of the Western Basin of Lake Erie to the 303(d) list would trigger actions to address the problems we face now and lead to the eventual restoration of our water quality to acceptable standards. Moreover, this would provide legally enforceable mechanisms that transcend political administrations.”

“No one can dispute western Lake Erie’s drink water is impaired by toxic algae,” **said Adam Rissien, Ohio Environmental Council’s Agricultural & Water Policy Director.** “Proposed current reduction targets are not legally enforceable. We need firm limits on the amount of pollution allowed to enter the lake and an enforceable road map in order to adequately restore its water

quality. That is why we urge the US EPA to take charge and designate the western Lake Erie basin as impaired. This would establish a reliable mechanism to prevent toxic algae from threatening people's tap water. One that would not rely on voluntary measures or be beholden to the political whims of future administrations."

"Lake Erie is in so much trouble you can see it from space," **said Joel Brammeier, President and CEO of the Alliance for the Great Lakes.** "Our water is toxic at the source, and that demands a plan that shows where pollution is coming from and whether it is being reduced every year. Only then will we know we are back on a path to safe drinking water, abundant recreation and water that supports rather than sabotages local businesses."

"I've seen a 25 percent drop in revenue this season, and several people canceled their fishing trips after hearing about the lake's toxic algae," **said Captain Paul Pacholski, President, Lake Erie Charter Boat Association.** "It only takes a few hits like this to put some captains out of business."

"Declaring the western Lake Erie waters impaired triggers a process to identify sources and amounts of harmful algae producing nutrients," **said Sandy Bihn, Lake Erie Waterkeeper.** "Then there is an implementation plan that has periodic reporting requirements as well as an economic assessment of reduction options that yields investments that get the biggest algae reductions at the lowest cost. When Lake Erie recovered in the 1970's, there was a plan and accountability – we need that now."

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