

OHIO STRENGTHENS EFFORTS TO FURTHER PROTECT LAKE ERIE WATER QUALITY

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;
- Imposing 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 programs can be used so that existing sources of funds can be put to wider use 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 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 Water Treatment Plants**: Ohio EPA will make available \$50 million in zero-interest rate loans for water treatment infrastructure upgrades and back-up water sources at public water systems. 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 Ohio 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.
- New Testing Protocols Adopted: 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 provide training for all public water systems on testing protocols and also conduct testing for public water systems that do not have the capability to test their own water.

New \$1.25 Million Lake Erie Nutrient Reduction Program to Strengthen Water Quality in Lake Erie Watershed

A new \$1.25 million conservation program repurposes existing dollars to assist farmers in implementing 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 producers install best management practices on more than 40,000 acres in northwest Ohio. These practices were recognized as three critical ways to improve water quality based on the Ohio Phosphorus II Task Force report.

Cover crops are a great best management practice, as they improve soil health and decrease runoff. Some crops even store nutrients in the soil, reducing the need to spread fertilizer the next spring. Controlled drainage structures and blind tile inlets reduce runoff through field tiles, ultimately reducing loading into the lake.

- Nearly 30 Counties Will 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 in funds for Ohio institutions to conduct algal bloom research that would have an immediate and lasting impact.

More information about Ohio's nutrient management efforts can be found at:
<http://www.epa.ohio.gov/Portals/35/wqs/NutrientMangementInitiatives.pdf>