

**Summary Report**  
**Public Meeting on the Great Lakes**  
**Your Voice: Toledo**



**Thursday, March 23, 2017**  
**University of Toledo Lake Erie Center**  
**Oregon, OH**

## Introduction

The International Joint Commission visited Toledo, Ohio as part of public meetings in six communities in the spring of 2017 to gather public comment on the Canadian and US governments' Progress Report of the Parties (PROP) and the IJC's draft Triennial Assessment of Progress (TAP) report.

During the evening public meeting, three presenters summarized the latest research on Lake Erie, Ohio's Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan, and the connection between the Agreement and the development of domestic action plans in the US to restore Lake Erie. More than 140 area residents from the western region of Lake Erie attended the meeting and 23 participants provided Commissioners with their comments about Great Lakes water quality concerns. These comments are summarized below.

The IJC's final TAP report will take these comments into account. The Toledo-specific and broader regional conclusions and recommendations may also provide direction to the region's residents for collaborating on solutions for unique priorities in their particular watershed.

IJC representation at meeting:

Lana Pollack, US Chair

Gordon Walker, Canadian Chair

Benoit Bouchard, Canadian Commissioner

Trish Morris, Director, IJC Great Lakes Regional Office (GLRO) Raj

Bejankiwar, Physical Scientist/Deputy Director, IJC GLRO Jennifer

Boehme, Physical Scientist, IJC GLRO

Kevin Bunch, Writer-Communications Specialist, IJC US Section Sally

Cole-Misch, Public Affairs Officer, IJC GLRO

Jeff Kart, Executive Editor, Great Lakes Connection and Water Matters, IJC US Section Sarah

Lobrichon, Acting Public Affairs Advisor, IJC Canadian Section

Allison Voglesong, IJC Michigan Sea Grant Fellow

## Key Messages from the Evening Public Session

### Use of animal waste as fertilizer and nutrient pollution

Many attendees raised the need for mandatory regulations on the amount and type of animal waste from the more than 150 CAFOs in the watershed, which is used as fertilizer on farm land. Lake Erie recovered in the 1970s because of mandated changes to detergents and limits to fertilizer use, and it will take the same laws today to restore Lake Erie to health and prevent harmful algal blooms from returning each summer. These regulations should be based on sound science and enacted around the lake basin, and provide parity with grain farmers who already have to meet restrictions on their use of phosphorus fertilizers. Fines need to be commensurate with the detrimental impact caused when these regulations aren't followed, and the western Lake Erie basin declared impaired to force those who are creating the problems to change their actions. Additional education is needed for the farming community to understand and enact these restrictions.

### Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), safe drinking water and beach closures

Nutrient pollution from municipalities, agriculture and other nonpoint sources continues to enter Lake Erie, in spite of significant infrastructure upgrades and the above-mentioned restrictions, contributing to the annual growth of HABs in western Lake Erie. Excessive phosphorus is not the only issue, however; the bacteria in the blooms and high levels of microcystin cause beach closures and unsafe drinking water supplies, as occurred in Toledo in 2014. Governments have generally provided safe

drinking water, but the need for infrastructure improvements is dire. Ohio provides an excellent model to other states and provinces of how to monitor beaches for mycrosystin, alerting the public quickly of those results and closing beaches as needed. Consistent rules and advisories for beach closings are needed throughout the Great Lakes basin.

## **RAP Progress, wetlands restoration and green infrastructure**

Much has been accomplished over the past 30 years for the Maumee River Area of Concern, from upgrading wastewater treatment plants and closing leaching landfills to improvements on industrial sites. Work is focusing on restoring habitat and wetlands and dredging contaminated sediment, with all work projected to be completed by 2025. Continued funding from GLRI will be essential to continue this progress.

Wetlands restoration can play a key role in slowing the runoff of nutrients into Lake Erie. Wastewater wetlands, backfilling ditches with rocks, cattails and other native plants, restoring wetlands in the upper part of the watershed, and working with agricultural residents to install small-scale wetlands on fields will help to capture and filter water before it enters the Maumee River and Lake Erie. These projects have been started by a local nongovernment organization (Blackswamp Conservancy) and by University of Toledo graduate students, who can measure loadings before and after the wetlands are created. Another project funded by US EPA is teaching middle school and high school students how green infrastructure helps urban runoff and how to measure this progress. If students learn about the valuable role they can play as citizens to improve their environment, an entire generation will be created who care and are committed to keeping their communities safe and clean. Education is a key component for all environmental issues.

## **Radionuclides and nuclear waste**

The Coalition for a Nuclear Free Great Lakes, a coalition of more than 100 groups, urges the IJC to recommend to the governments that radionuclides be listed as a Chemical of Mutual Concern. The nearby Davis Besse nuclear power plant has had at least six recorded close calls with significant leaks, more than any other plant in the US. There is no containment if any plant leaks into the Great Lakes. The lakes are too valuable to risk nuclear contamination from this and any of the other 60 plants, from a proposed Fermi three in southern Michigan, to the proposed nuclear repository next to Lake Huron, and from the proposed trucking of nuclear waste from Canada through the Great Lakes region to Kentucky or proposed barging of nuclear waste on Lake Michigan.

## **Draft TAP report and others issues**

While the draft TAP report provides a good overview of Agreement progress, it doesn't provide the status of each lake or measurements of progress for each annex. The report mentions climate change, but needs to point to this as what is driving so much change in the lakes themselves with resulting environmental justice issues for the region's residents. This will only increase over time. Asian carp, other aquatic invasive species and the Enbridge Line 5 pipeline should be recognized for the huge threats that they pose to the lakes and to our collective ecosystem.

## **Public Comments (Click hyperlink of participant name to view video comments)**

[David Spangler, Lake Erie Charter Boat Association](#): My association agrees with the draft TAP report on the unacceptability of western Lake Erie phosphorus loading. Our organization just sent a letter to Department of Agriculture to look at the state 590 manure standards, asking manure to be recognized as commercial fertilizer. Too many people not doing soil testing and we will push for mandatory soil testing next.

[Lynn Sherman](#): I was part of studies in 1973 at the University of Toledo to research algae. I believe the problem now is not about typical algae, but harmful algae blooms that are bacterial in makeup. Less focus should be on phosphorus input, it isn't the only issue.

[Theresa Lane](#): Lake Erie recovered in the 1970s because of mandated changes – if voluntary; the detergent industry and sewage plants would never have changed. Cows produce 23 times the waste per day as humans. It is spread on farm fields and eventually ends up in Lake Erie. Strong regulations are essential to stop high animal waste loadings, just as we created for fertilizer loadings. This is the only way to bring Lake Erie back again.

[David Housholder](#), *multigenerational farmer*: With livestock manure used as phosphorus fertilizer, grain producers are getting the short-end-of-the-stick. We have to regulate the use of animal waste around the basin. CAFOs shouldn't be able to immigrate into Ohio; we don't have the appropriate regulations on them.

[Nick Mandros](#), *Ohio Environmental Council*: The Council agrees with the TAP report's conclusions that voluntary measures alone won't achieve water quality results. Here are some recommendations to add to the report:

Objective 1: Governments have generally provided safe drinking water, but the need for infrastructure improvements is dire and the report should reflect that.

Objective 2: The basin needs consistent rules and advisories for how and why they close beaches.

Objective 6: Without mandatory regulations, we won't accomplish the objective of reducing nutrients into lakes from human activity. We recommend specific proposals by the IJC to ensure that compliance is accomplished for reductions in nutrient pollution.

[Marya Czech](#), *Urban Waters Project*: Those who drink lake water are stakeholders. My community has a project funded by the EPA to teach communities how green infrastructure works for urban runoff. I invite you to view it. Middle and high school students can help researchers with water monitoring. If students learn about the real life value to the citizen scientists' role, there will be entire generation of people who recognize the role they can play in keeping our environment safe and clean. Not all the blame for nutrient pollution is on farmers; urban communities are part of the issue as well.

[Chris Collier](#), *Blackswamp Conservancy*: Our group is working on the restoration of wetlands in the upper watershed to capture water as it leaves major creeks before it enters Maumee River. We are trying a pilot program with agricultural residents in the area to install small-scale wetlands that will hold and slow drainage of water from farm fields into streams, rivers and then Lake Erie.

[Sandy Bihn](#), *Lake Erie Waterkeeper and IJC WQB member*: TAP report doesn't give the status of each lake, or measurements of progress for each annex. I'd like to see these items to measure progress. In the section on drinking water, the IJC needs to identify the sources that are causing increased treatment and the associated high costs at water treatment plants. Ohio does a great job of microcystin monitoring, use this as a model to judge how other states and provinces are doing in monitoring microcystin levels. A report need to be created showing where new CAFOs are located that will affect Lake Erie. Michigan gets the jobs, Ohio gets the poop.

[Mike Ferner](#), *Advocates for Clean Lake Erie*: In the western Lake Erie watershed there are some 150 CAFOs that are large enough to be registered with the state. 700 million gallons of feces and urine is going onto fields every year. All of it goes into Lake Erie, which is dealing with the equivalent of the human waste of the cities of Chicago and Los Angeles spread across the western Lake Erie basin. THIS is the problem; no one talks about it, no one does anything about it.

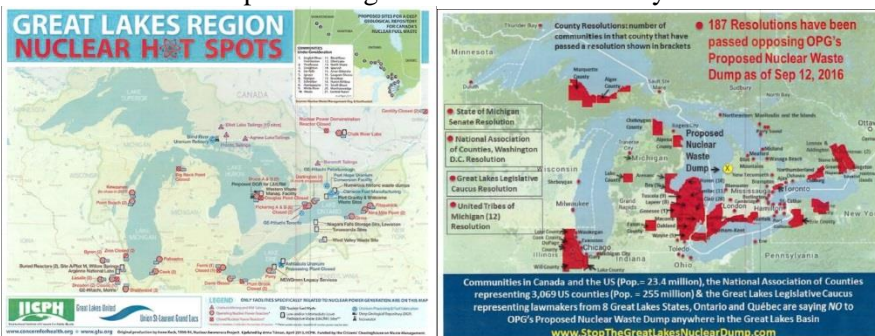
[Karen Ash, Ohio Department of Health:](#) There are several actions we can take to slow and filter water getting into Lake Erie. Promote wastewater wetlands; backfill ditches with rocks, cattails, and plants which can naturally filter that water. The University of Toledo graduate students can create these wetlands and measure the before and after. Maybe we can see improvements and lessening of nutrients into the lake, river, and streams.

[John Kusnier, Maumee AOC Advisory Council chair:](#) For the last 30 years our AOC has accomplished a lot. We have focused on wastewater treatment plants, closed leaching landfills, forced improvements on industrial sites; and focusing now on restoring habitat and wetlands to improve water quality. The AOC is projected to complete all work by 2025. Much of our work has been funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). We want the IJC to use whatever influence it has to continue to have the governments fund the GLRI to keep our work going forward. The longer projects take, the more they cost. Federal and state agencies need adequate staffing and budgets to keep these projects moving forward.

[Eric Kraus, lifelong resident:](#) We request that the IJC urge continued funding of the GLRI, which has created significant on-the-ground improvements. Put your money where your mouth is – this is not a political issue, it's important to keep funding for the Great Lakes.

[Charles Mitch, Sierra Club:](#) How does the IJC identify and decide on its priorities? We need to know this in the report. Are regulations being created for CAFOs based on science? I don't believe so, or we wouldn't allow so much waste to be put on fields every day. I fully support the 40% reduction on nutrients, but sound science is needed to study the capacity of the ground to absorb wastes and deal with them effectively.

[Kevin Kamps, Beyond Nuclear:](#) I work as a radioactive waste specialist for Beyond Nuclear. Over a year ago a coalition of more than 100 groups nominated that radionuclides be listed as Chemical of Mutual Concern, led by Canadian Environmental Law Association. I've done a lot of work at the Davis Bessey nuclear plant nearby- it has more close calls with disasters than at any nuclear plant in country. Davis Bessey has an issue with containment, and if accident happens, there is NO containment. Thanks to Ohio legislators who joined with Michigan and other congressional representatives to try to stop the nuclear repository in Lake Huron, which my organization has been fighting for 16 years. Highly radioactive waste is being transported in trucks across basin every day, and proposed for barge transport on Lake Michigan. These are unprecedented risks to our water. Only one of these barges would cause catastrophic damage to the entire lake ecosystem.



*Response from Chris Winslow, Ohio Sea Grant College Program (one of evening's speakers):* two key ongoing projects will measure the amount of phosphorus coming out of various types of manure, and how can it be reformulated to ensure low levels of phosphorus in what's put on fields. The second project tracks phosphorus in water to identify biological source – types of animals, human, plant

fertilizer. Climate change also being studied as well, in very specific ways.

*Edward Gauss, Community Cooperative Association:* I worked for 32 years for a car company that spent 10 billion dollars over ten years to improve paint procedures so it didn't go down the drain. Regulations are important for industry and agriculture. Our industry built tanks to take sludge from factories to hazardous waste sites. Do the same for animal waste – build a tank, take it to be processed into fertilizer, and put it into the market to sell. We must fine farmers enough to put them out of business if they don't stop putting excess waste on land. It should be criminal to do this, as it's jeopardizing our entire lives.

*Michael Keegan, Coalition for a Nuclear Free Great Lakes:* I was at the 1987 IJC public meeting and asked about radionuclides in the Great Lakes basin. Some sixty nuclear power plants exist across the Great Lakes. We must learn the lessons from Chernobyl and Japan. The proposed Fermi-Three would emit millions of gallons of high temperature water with possible radionuclides in it. And 10,000 tons of radioactive waste is proposed to be trucked across Canada into Kentucky, through the Great Lakes region, both of these must not happen. Please consider radionuclides as Chemicals of Mutual Concern.

*Rick Graham, Izaak Walton GL committee:* Enbridge Line 5 pipeline and others in the basin are a huge danger to the lakes. We need to clamp down on ship ballast water discharges, there's a huge potential for further damage from invasive species, especially Asian carp. The western basin of Lake Erie needs to be declared impaired to force people who are creating the problems to change their actions and restore our waters.

*Katie McKibben, former employee of Ohio EPA:* The draft TAP report recognizes climate change, but not to my satisfaction. All the stakeholders need to acknowledge climate change and the need to adapt to it. Climate change is an environmental justice issue for citizens across the globe which will only increase over time.

*Tom Garey:* We've seen amazing progress on the Ottawa River cleanup. Thank you to all who have helped. The goal is to swim in it by 2030, but that's not good enough. We need to speed cleanup to enhance the river, which is a tributary to Lake Erie. We need to learn from the different outlook and perspective that Native people bring.

*Elizabeth Uhlik:* I am a mother who brought her daughter with me tonight. This has been a tremendous education for both of us. My parents were farmers, when I was young we saw frogs and bees everywhere. We don't see either anymore. Our children will remember what we do. Please be active and consider this a personal mission to protect our earth. Thank you for all you are doing.

*Bill Myers, Myers Farm:* In addressing issues with agriculture, everyone needs to not be as hostile. Universities are telling us how much fertilizer to apply. Fertilizer companies are pushing more on us. If we need to put less on our fields, tell us and train us. What do you do with multimillion dollar investments in fertilizer that may put family farms out of business? We need to come up with an acceptable alternative that will keep farmers in business. Research needs to tell us what we need to do. Agriculture as a whole – our entire lives are about farming, our children play on the fields – we don't want to pollute any more than anyone else. Just get the information out to us, with training and encouragement.

*Response from Jeff Reuter, moderator and past director of Ohio Sea Grant College Program:* From recent research we know that 78% of phosphorus into Lake Erie comes from 48 farms. The next step is to identify and reach out specifically to those farmers.