

Editorial: Lake law needed

THE BLADE EDITORIAL BOARD

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The International Joint Commission created by the United States and Canada in 1972 to monitor and protect the quality of water in the lakes and rivers shared by the two nations has worrisome news for Lake Erie.

The latest IJC assessment of the Great Lakes concludes that Lake Erie is in the worst shape of all the Great Lakes. The IJC says Lake Erie has deteriorated since 1970, has not achieved the goal of a 40 percent reduction of phosphorus from 2008 levels, and the worst portion of the worst lake is the western basin serving as Toledo's water source.

The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 1972 has been a great success at eliminating pollution from industries and cities from entering Lake Erie. Laws against this source of pollution have been enacted and enforced in both the United States and Canada. Now the IJC says their "most urgent focus" is on a Lake Erie action plan that brings the same standard of enforceable laws to pollution created by runoff of fertilizer or manure from unregulated agriculture.

It's a longstanding refrain in the IJC assessment of the Great Lakes provided every three years. In 2017, enforceable standards for nonpoint sources of pollution was the recommendation for Lake Erie. In 2020, the IJC said laws regulating concentrated animal feeding operations were needed. The 2023 report says

voluntary programs in Ohio and Canada are not working and need to become enforceable law.

The international body flatly rejects Ohio's claim that H2Ohio has the state "on the right track" for Lake Erie protection. The IJC says the "major challenge" to combating the algal blooms spreading from Lake Erie's western basin to the central shoreline is a "voluntary, non-regulatory approach to nonpoint pollution."

Basically, as long as the United States and Canada treat CAFOs like factories instead of farms Lake Erie will not meet agreed-upon standards for safe drinking water, swimming, fishing, and boating.

Ohio can have unregulated multithousand-head livestock feeding operations or it can have a Lake Erie shoreline safe for swimmers. But it cannot have both.

The problem isn't solely Ohio. IJC says enforceable regulations on CAFOs need to have a common framework in the United States and Canada. The common framework of voluntary programs isn't solving the problem and the PR spin claiming otherwise isn't fooling the public.

The IJC has polled the public on Great Lakes issues since 2015. The latest poll shows 59 percent of residents believe there are too few regulations to protect the Great Lakes. In 2015, just 40 percent of the public thought more regulation was needed to protect the lakes.

The poll shows most residents want the U.S. federal government and Canada to create laws to protect the lake rather than states or provinces. Of the 40 million people covered by the International Joint Commission, no one faces a more urgent

problem than Toledoans who rely upon the deteriorating western basin of Lake Erie.

The time for voluntary solutions or one-state laws is over. Rep. Marcy Kaptur needs to make this a legislative priority for the sake of Toledo's future.

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