

SOLVING THE GREAT LAKES NUTRIENT CRISIS

Nutrient pollution, which fuels massive harmful algal blooms, is a clear danger not only to our drinking water, but our region's way of life and economic well-being. This summer more than half a million people in communities around western Lake Erie experienced drinking water bans ranging from a few days to more than a week thanks to high levels of toxins from algal blooms in the lake. This is a problem that is being felt most acutely in western Lake Erie, but it is well-entrenched in other locations throughout the Great Lakes region.



Photo credit: Lyman Welch.

At the same time, the Great Lakes region is focusing on developing a "blue economy" for the Midwest. We must realize that this new economic future cannot stand with national headlines declaring Great Lakes water unsafe to drink.

Fortunately, the problem is not out of our control. It is preventable. Three key actions are needed:

Nutrient Pollution Control Commitment from Great Lakes States and Provinces

The Great Lakes states and provinces must be leaders at the forefront of stopping the flow of pollution into the Great Lakes. We are calling on the states and provinces to commit to measurable reductions of phosphorus on a clear timetable from all appropriate sources so that the risk of harmful algal blooms is eliminated.

A Clear Target

A wide range of scientific reports about the Great Lakes make it clear that current pollution control targets for the lakes are not protective. We need clear criteria and standards for water quality performance adopted in regulation by our federal governments and states/provinces. And, we need to measure whether we are achieving those standards. Most importantly, if the numbers or on the ground conditions show us that the problem is getting worse, we have to change regulation and investments quickly and adapt.



Photo credit: Lloyd DeGrane.

A Level Playing Field

Finally and most importantly, we need a level playing field. We know the value of pulling together and the Great Lakes region stands strong when we do that, but only if we stand strong behind a rational and fair approach. To solve this problem, we need significant pollution reductions from agriculture.

From pursuing protective policies to taking action on-the-ground to educating our communities, the Alliance for the Great Lakes works to protect our unique heritage: the Great Lakes. The Alliance is headquartered in Chicago with offices in Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Grand Haven and Milwaukee. For more information visit www.greatlakes.org or call (312) 939-0838.