

Ohio concentrates effort to reduce harmful Lake Erie algae

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Ohio's environmental regulators who have pledged to drastically cut what's feeding the harmful algae in Lake Erie will consolidate oversight of the work to make sure money is being well spent and research isn't overlapping.

The proposal brought by Gov. John Kasich's administration and approved by the legislature last week will put the Ohio Lake Erie Commission in charge of seeing that the state reaches its goal of a 40 percent reduction of phosphorus going into western Lake Erie within the next 10 years.

Both Michigan and the Canadian province of Ontario have pledged to make the same reduction, which researchers say will go a long way to improving water quality.

To cut down on the algae, Ohio and its neighboring states are focusing on encouraging farmers to take voluntary steps that prevent manure and fertilizers from flowing into the lake's tributaries and reducing overflows from [sewage treatment plants](#).

Environmental groups have expressed doubts about whether the voluntary efforts will be enough to make a significant dent in the [algae blooms](#) that are a threat to both drinking water and wildlife.

Revamping the Lake Erie commission, which primarily has overseen state policies on [water quality](#) and coastal management, will make sure

priorities are aligned when it comes to dealing with the algae, said Craig Butler, director of Ohio's Environmental Protection Agency.

That will help make sure money and opportunities aren't wasted, he said.

State and federal spending to combat the algae has increased greatly since toxins from [algae](#) contaminated the tap water for 400,000 people in Toledo and southeastern Michigan in 2014.

The commission, whose members include the directors of six state agencies, won't necessarily dictate how the money is spent, but it will coordinate ongoing work while also keeping in touch with universities and environmental groups doing their own research, Butler said.

"We want to know and understand what they're doing too," he said.

In addition, the legislation that still needs Kasich's signature also will pave the way to finding new uses for tons of sediment dredged from shipping channels along the lake.

In just three years, Ohio will no longer allow the sediment to be dumped into the lake.

Both Ohio and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which maintains the shipping channels, have been working on finding new ways of the silt that is dredged from harbors to keep them navigable.

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