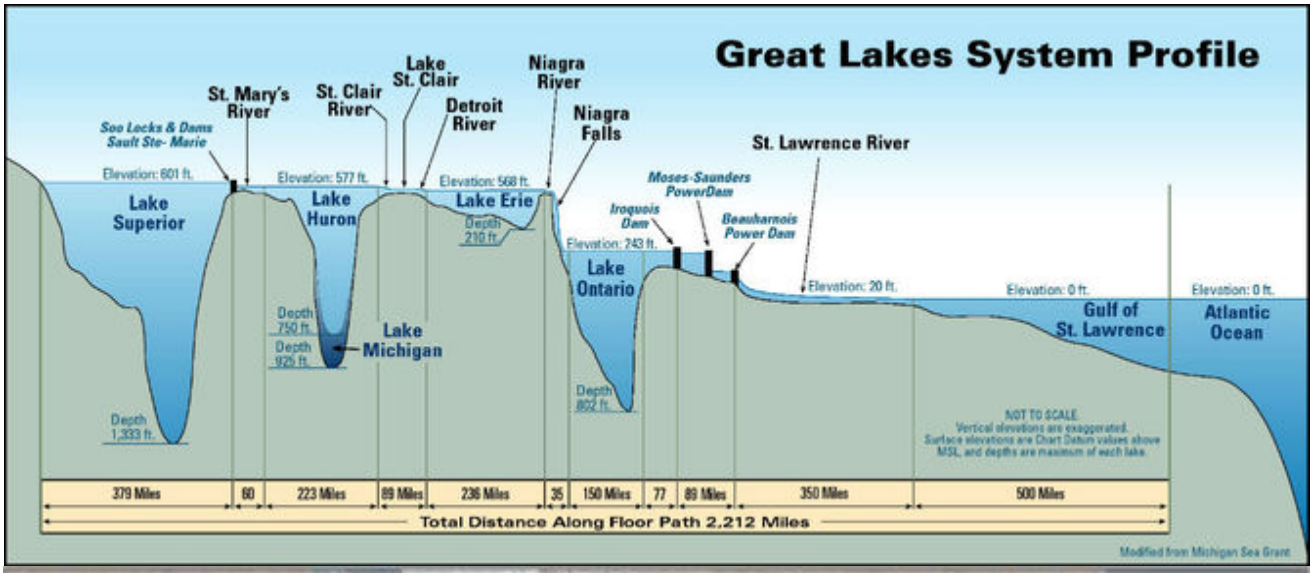
Saving Lake Erie



Because of Land Use, Lake Erie Gets:
2. Nutrient Loading

OHIO SEA GRANT AND STONE LABORATORY

Microcystis, Stone Lab, 8/10/10

Photos: Jeff Reutter

Although Lake Erie water is only 2% of the Great Lakes, it provides drinking water for millions of people, electricity from over 20 power plants, and contains 50% of all the Great Lakes fish. Our lake is the most valuable fresh water fishery in the world. Power production, fishing, and tourism generate billions of dollars a year in revenues.

All this activity requires clean water. Unfortunately, the high levels of agriculture, industry, communities, and people surrounding the lake create serious water pollution. Phosphorus and nitrogen can cause an overabundance of algae in the water. Toxic algae can sicken people, animals, and kill fish. In the 1960s the toxic algae blooms in the lake required legislation to reduce phosphorus from some detergents and cleaning supplies. Farmers also changed to lower phosphorus and nitrogen fertilizers. Those efforts helped clean up the lake to the point that by the 1980s we were the "Walleye Capital of the World."

Unfortunately, today this type of pollution has again risen to dangerous levels. In 2014, toxic algae caused nearly a half-million residents in Toledo to use bottled water for two days. There is good news, however. By reducing phosphorus and nitrogen flows into the lake by 40%, we could be at safe algae levels in weeks. This will take combined efforts by legislators, agriculture and residents to accomplish.

There are many other pollutants contaminating our water in addition to phosphorus and nitrogen. ***Residents can help reduce much of these pollutants by making a few easy and simple changes.***

Reduce nitrogen and phosphorus. These chemicals in detergents, cleaners, and fertilizers go from your home and yard into the lake. Buy products with no phosphorous and use less fertilizer. Avoid washing anything on the driveway to prevent detergent running into the storm drain. Wait until after it rains to fertilize the lawn. To learn about organic lawn care, go to http://www.planetnatural.com/organic-lawn-care-101.

Clean green. Harsh cleaning chemicals can harm you and the environment. Soap and water, vinegar, and baking soda will clean almost anything. Avoid cleaning products with antibiotics (vinegar is a safe, mild disinfectant). Reduce the use of bleach. Take unwanted prescriptions to a local drop box. For information on Green Cleaning workshops, contact cuyahogaswcd.org, 216-524-6480x16.

Avoid products with "microbeads." Trillions of these plastic, pinhead size beads are going into the waterways. Once in the water they absorb toxins and then get into the fish. Many facial scrub cosmetics and super cleaning toothpastes contain these beads. For a list of products go to http://onepercentfortheplanet.org/2014/10/a-list-of-products-that-contain-plastic-microbeads.

Pick up the poop. Animal waste from agriculture and our yards is a major pollutant. For a small yard sign from the NEO Sewer District to remind dog walkers to "Pick up the Poop," call 216-881-6600.

Adopt a storm drain. Water from storm drains takes dirt, cut grass, leaves, debris, and yard runoff directly to the lake. Picking up litter and raking out your closest drain before a rain will help reduce these pollutants and prevent street flooding.

Support local organic farmers. Sustainable agriculture practices produce healthy food and reduce pollution. Buying organic foods helps them stay in business and encourages other farmers to join them.

Go native. Native plants require less water, no fertilizers, and support birds and bees. Replace a patch of lawn with native flowers and shrubs. Avoid herbicides and pesticides that kill birds, bees, and fish in very high numbers.

Encourage legislators to pass laws protecting our waters. Contact your local, county and state governments to find out how they are helping the environment.

For more information go to http://www.epa.gov/nutrientpollution/sources-and-solutions. Contact the Cleveland Metroparks Watershed Stewardship Center, The Friends of Euclid Creek, Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District, NEO Sewer District, or the Cleveland Water Alliance to get involved.

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