

# INDIANA/WESTERN LAKE ERIE FINAL WLEB IMPLEMENTATION PLAN LETTER

July 27, 2015

Dear Governor Pence,

Indiana and other Great Lakes conservation and environmental organizations listed below ask you to show leadership in addressing harmful algal blooms in the western Lake Erie basin by joining Ohio, Michigan, and Ontario in committing to reduce phosphorus entering the basin by 40% by 2025 from 2008 levels. This paradigm-changing commitment is an extremely important first step that follows the scientific consensus that 40% reductions will significantly reduce the prevalence and impact of harmful algal blooms in the basin.

As you know, the status of the Great Lakes as a globally unique drinking water resource is at risk from harmful algal blooms caused by excess nutrient runoff. This threatens the quality of life and economic vitality that make the Great Lakes such an asset to their bordering states. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Lake Erie, which generates \$12.9 billion in annual economic impact from tourism and recreation in Ohio alone. Lake Erie also provides drinking water to 11 million people.

Every year Lake Erie suffers from algal blooms—both nuisance algae, which contributes to dead zones and deters tourism, and harmful algal blooms, which produce potent toxins that threaten human health. There is scientific consensus that nutrients from agricultural lands are the main unaddressed source of these water-quality impairments. These issues are exacerbated by

higher than average water temperatures and shifts in nutrient cycling wrought by zebra and quagga mussels.

Algal blooms hurt the fishing and tourism industry and threaten public health. Swim bans are once again becoming commonplace in Lake Erie. During the summer of 2013, residents of Carroll Township outside of Toledo were ordered not to drink water due to high levels of microcystin, a toxin produced by harmful algal blooms. A similar order was issued on a much more dramatic scale in August 2014, when nearly 500,000 customers of Toledo's water utility were unable to drink or use tap water for more than 48 hours. Canada's Pelee Island also experienced a drinking water ban. Bans affecting smaller numbers of people persisted for weeks. National and international headlines brought much-needed attention to this crisis.

Fort Wayne and Northeast Indiana are approximately 100 miles from Toledo and Lake Erie's shores. Any reduction in tourism to the Lake is likely to impact Indiana's economy as well. As you know, Indiana holds over 820,000 acres in the western Lake Erie basin, representing 17 percent of the area in the basin, including portions of the St. Joseph, Upper Maumee and St. Mary's watersheds. Furthermore, Indiana's farmers are national leaders in agricultural conservation practices that reduce nutrient loadings such as the use of cover crops. Indiana should take its rightful place in leading efforts to address the problem of excess phosphorus entering our waters.

The Great Lakes region has made a lot of progress toward protecting and restoring our Lakes by working together to address threats and garner critical public, state, provincial and federal support. Because of the Clean Water Act in the U.S., significant progress has been made in reducing nutrient pollution from point sources. Ontario's Nutrient Management Act and Clean Water Act have similarly reduced nutrient pollution. We, however, have failed to keep pace

with other pollution threats like agricultural runoff. As a result, decades of work to revitalize our economy, environment and quality of life are at risk.

We need your support and participation to help prevent toxic algae from threatening people's drinking water and shoreline communities. Our organizations are willing and able to work with you to achieve a 40% reduction of phosphorus entering western Lake Erie by 2025. We hope you will take the first step by joining Ohio, Michigan and Ontario in their commitment to this goal.

Sincerely,

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Cc: Tom Easterly, Commissioner, Indiana Department of Environmental Management

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