

# The News-Herald

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## Journal Register

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"Search for truth is the noblest occupation of man;  
its publication is a duty."

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## Good work to fix huge algae issues

Anybody over the age of 50 likely can recall the environmental death and eventual resurrection of Lake Erie. Remembered are the days when washed-up mats of blue-green algae despoiled beaches and the water often stunk to the high heavens.

Absent as well was the outstanding angling now enjoyed by the lake's sports fisheries, worth many billions of dollars annually.

All of that seemed to be something of a faded memory. That was until this summer when the ugly head of blue-green algae resurfaced in the face of record-breaking rains.

These rains allowed heavy run-off from farm fields, chiefly from western Ohio's Maumee River, Lake Erie's largest watershed and the state's farming breadbasket.

This runoff was heavily laden with phosphorous that the algae feasted on.

The chemical is the residue of fertilizer, much needed by grain farmers to produce bumper crops of such items as corn and soybeans.

Then too, over-taxed and aged municipal water filtration systems were found to be contributors to the problem as well.

And as summer progressed the bloom clawed its way east, eventually turning Lake Erie's waters off Northeast Ohio into a pea-green soup.

It was one thing when two years ago several of Ohio's inland reservoirs were impacted by the same algae problem but when Ohio's most important natural resource and asset became involved, the clarion call for action was put in overdrive.

At stake — again — is the very life of Lake Erie and the hold it has on the state's economy, recreation and water supply.

Fortunately, government is not being slow to react.

Two months ago, officials from the Ohio departments of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Agency announced efforts to reduce agriculture-related phosphorus run-off, and to encourage farmers to immediately adopt best management practices for fertilizer application.

"Thirty years ago farmers in the four million-acre Western Basin were challenged to meet aggressive standards for reducing the total amount of phosphorus impacting Lake Erie," said then-Ohio Agriculture Director James Zehringer, who is now the Natural Resources director.

"We commend those farmers for meeting that challenge and in cutting phosphorus use in half.

However, we now know that while those goals of reducing total phosphorus have been met, the dissolved form of phosphorus has increased markedly. The agriculture community needs to work with one voice, and a sense of urgency, to minimize the impact of dissolved phosphorus on Lake Erie and all of Ohio's waterways."

Clearly, time is of the essence as once again Lake Erie has been placed on life support.