

## **MEETING MINUTES**

**March 9, 2022  
University of Toledo, Lake Erie Center**

### **Call to Order and Roll Call – Laurie Stevenson, Director, Ohio EPA and Commission Chair**

The Ohio Lake Erie Commission (OLEC) meeting was called to order at 10:04 a.m.

#### **Commission Members Present:**

Laurie Stevenson, Director of Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA)  
Mary Mertz, Director, Ohio Department of Natural Resources  
Dorothy Pelanda, Director of Ohio Department of Agriculture  
Tim Hill, Designee, Ohio Department of Transportation  
Gene Phillips, Designee, Ohio Department of Health  
Bill Wolf, Commissioner  
Jim Stouffer, Commissioner  
Crystal Davis, Commissioner  
Danielle Giannantonio, Commissioner  
Diane Miller, Commissioner

#### **Staff Present:**

Joy Mulinex, OLEC  
Lynn Garrity, OLEC  
Sandra Kosek-Sills, OLEC  
Nicole Mieske Knab, OLEC

#### **Guests:**

Speakers:  
24 observers in the audience

#### **Welcome and Agenda Overview: Laurie Stevenson, Director, OEPA**

Director Stevenson called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. She asked for a roll call.

(roll call)

**Commissioner Diane Miller moved the following resolution:**

Resolved, meeting minutes from December 8, 2021. Dorothy Pelanda seconded the motion.

No discussion followed. A roll-call vote was held, and Commission members voted all in favor.

**Resolved, election of Commission Chair and Secretary**

Based on by-laws, the selection of a chair and secretary is an annual requirement of the Commission, and the positions are open to any agency commission member for the year.

Director Pelanda nominated Laurie Stevenson as Chair of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission, and Danielle Giannantonio seconded.

No discussion followed. A roll-call vote was held, and Commission members voted unanimously for Director Stevenson to serve as Chair. Director Stevenson thanked everyone for their votes of confidence and shared her enthusiasm for serving as the chair in 2022.

**Resolved, election of Commission Secretary.** Director Stevenson thanked Director Mertz for serving in the role and invited Director Mertz to share any words about the responsibilities of secretary. Director Mertz shared that it is a delight to serve as secretary on the Commission especially now that the needle is moving on cleaning up issues on Lake Erie and noted she was excited to be a contributing member of the Commission.

Director Pelanda nominated Mary Mertz to serve as Secretary of the Commission for 2022. Commissioner Bill Wolf seconded the motion.

No other nominations were shared, and a roll-call vote was held. All Commission members voted for Director Mertz to serve as secretary.

**Resolution of Celebration the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission.**

Director Stevenson acknowledged OLEC's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and recognized Governor DeWine's H2Ohio initiative and the federal efforts to fund additional water infrastructure work.

Lynn Garrity spoke to the history of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission, which was created in House Bill 804 in 1990, with the OLEC office opening in 1992. The office was tasked with ensuring the coordination of federal, state, and local policies, programs and priorities pertaining to Lake Erie. Over \$12.4 million in Lake Erie Protection Fund Grants have been awarded. Over 650,000 Lake Erie Plates sold, and over 325 winning Life on Lake Erie photographs have been recognized.

**Resolved, 30 years of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission.** The Commission recognizes 30 years of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission and past accomplishments as well as the importance of the Commission's work on Lake Erie.

The motion was approved by Crystal Davis and seconded by Director Mary Mertz. A roll-call vote followed to commemorate the Commission's anniversary, and Commission members voted all in favor.

### **Resolved, Resolution on Lake Erie Protection Fund SFY22 Allocation**

Joy Mulinex provided background information on the Lake Erie Protection Fund Budget, explaining that the Lake Erie Commission receives funding of license plate sales, donations, cash transfers from the state agencies, and interest from the Great Lakes Protection Fund. Part of the statutory mission is to send money out for research and implementation projects as they relate to Lake Erie. The Commission works closely with the fiscal agent (Ohio EPA) to review needs and management of operations to know how much can be awarded for grants. The recommendation is \$150,000 for the Lake Erie Protection grants.

Lynn Garrity provided an overview for SFY22 LEPF grant cycle. It will be a competitive grant up to \$50k per project. The focus for this year will be the preparation of projects for federal funding to meet LEPR goals. The grants review committee will consist of agency representatives. Grant recommendations will be given at the June Commission meeting.

Director Mertz moved to approve a round of Lake Erie Protection Fund grants not to exceed \$150,000 for the Fiscal Year 2022, seconded by Diane Miller. The Commission voted in favor.

### **Special Reports**

Dr. Tom Bridgeman, Director, UT – Lake Erie Center– Research Overview of University of Toledo Lake Erie Center Work

Dr. Michael Weintraub, UT – Lake Erie Center – Coastal Observations, Mechanisms and Predictions Across Systems and Scales (COMPASS)

The slide presentations from the Special Reports can be found in the Minutes on Ohio Lake Erie Commission's website. <https://lakeerie.ohio.gov/about>

### **Ohio Lake Erie Commission Office Report, Joy Mulinex**

Joy Mulinex noted how the Commission staff has been working to make sure federal funding opportunities are identified for state agencies and other partners. There are several competitive grant programs to help with water quality/Great Lakes issues. OLEC will continue to monitor those opportunities and pass them along to partners.

A session was held with Great Lakes National Program Office through US EPA, as well as other funders (Sea Grant, ODNR Coast and Management Office who are receiving NOAA funds). The overall goal at the Commission is that the partners throughout Ohio are aware and ready to take on funding challenges and help Ohioans to take advantage of the opportunities.

The Great Lakes State Forum is planned for early April. This is an annual opportunity for state agencies to meet with US EPA Great Lakes National Program Office and talk about GLRI. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provided a significant increase in funding for GLRI – a total of \$1 billion dollars. Efforts were made to get more attention on Focus area 3 – nutrient management non-point source pollution issues that are feeding algae blooms. Harmful algae blooms and nutrient management are a point of focus.

ANNEX 2 – Commission staff sits in on a handful of Great Lakes Quality Annex Workgroups. Annex 2 is about the Lake wide Management Plans, regarding whole lake plans dealing with relevant issue is coming up on Lake Erie. Joy reported on the reimagining that is going on focusing on Annex 2 and projects/studies dealing with issues on multiple lakes.

Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), bill that authorizes the Corps of Engineers work throughout the country and traditionally passed by Congress every two years. The Great Lakes states agreed to ask for an amendment to alter the traditional cost share arrangement (federal 80% and state 20%) to 100% federal.

Ohio is three years into H2Ohio and seeing progress.

State of the Lake Conference happening March 15 -17 in Cleveland. This will be a great opportunity to connect with colleagues that people work and collaborate with on Lake Erie. The Commission will present multiple presentations.

Sandra Kosek-Sills presented on the State of the Lake Report (Lake Erie Quality Index). The State of the Lake Report, first requested in 1992 by Governor Voinovich was to be a 20-year retrospective of since the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972. 30 years later, the Lake Erie Commission is again doing the State of the Lake Erie Report, the fourth published edition. Starting in 1998, the Lake Erie Quality Index was included. Sandra talked through the layout of the report and highlighted the agencies opportunity to talk about the work they are doing towards Lake Erie around the metrics. Each agency will have a two-page spread that lists metrics relevant to agency. The goal of this section is to talk about agencies responsibilities around Lake Erie, work the agency is doing to protect and enhance Lake Erie. The goal is to have each director sign off on the spread and Governor DeWine's office approve content.

Lynn Garrity reported on the Areas of Concern, funding which comes from GLRI. The AOC program is continuing to identify budget priorities – mainly in the Cuyahoga and Maumee AOCs that remain. The Ohio AOC Program has identified priorities for 2022

and continues to make progress on BUI removals. Will work towards removing 2-4 BUIs in the coming year with local AOC program committees. Roughly 10 Management Actions are in place to be completed in the coming year thanks to a number of local implementers leading these projects. The Commission is continuing to work with US EPA with completion of remedial design of Cuyahoga Gorge Great Lakes Legacy Act project. Other highlights from the quarter:

- A Summit was held with AOC Advisory Committee representatives to talk about work everyone is doing to coordinate efforts. An area of completion coming online will be the Kitty Todd restoration project in the Maumee AOC.
- Great Lakes Legacy Act federal program under GLRI, are the highest priorities and cornerstone of AOC program. The GLLA projects in Ohio include Cuyahoga Gorge, Cuyahoga Old River Channel, Swan Creek, Lower Maumee (2 Sites) are that will address remaining legacy contaminated sediment issues. Ashtabula, Ottawa, and Otter Creek projects have been completed and collectively the three projects have removed nearly 1 million cu yards of contaminated sediment since 2010. Great Lakes Sediment & Nutrient Reduction Program Proposals Due April 22, 2022, [glc.org](http://glc.org)
- Lake Erie Protection Fund – a grant closed under Dr. John Farver with Department of Geology at Bowling Green State University. The grant researched developing best practices for disposal for boat wash waters at Ohio marinas – LEFP – SG 534-2018.
- Life on Lake Erie 30<sup>th</sup> Year Photo Contest, entry forms are available until July 31, 2022 and will offer prizes that will share Lake Erie experiences for the top winners.

**Commissioner Reports:** Each Commission member will provide a brief update as time allows.

Commissioner Jim Stouffer reported Lake Erie Shores and Islands are gearing up for the Boat Show for 2022. Mentioned last year brought covid challenges. This year brings fuel challenges. New boats from Miller and Kelly's Island boats will be on the water, and a symbol of investment and commitment to the Islands. Shared thanks for support H2Ohio and ODNR and their impact Lake Erie, paying attention to plastic and learning more about how plastics impact Lake Erie and how to best support initiatives. They are paying attention to wind turbine dynamics and what impacts will be and maintain a voice in that conversation. Working with groups to learn more about dredging and how to process manure through the thread of chemistry and how that impacts dredge material in the farm community.

Commissioner Crystal Davis had nothing to report.

Director Mary Mertz – Ohio Department of Natural Resources  
Attended Marina Conference at Headlands Dunes State Park and reference the wetlands complex being built and work being done for nutrient reduction. A section of the beach will be shut off in efforts to get boaters back in that area and in Maumee Bay. Magee Marsh, popular birding place, working on major renovations for visitors center after birding season to be ready for next year's birding season. At Maumee Bay State Park they are building a reunion cabin that will open early spring/summer that can hold

large groups/families. They secured grant funding to replace Maumee Bay boardwalk. H2Ohio, 80 projects are being worked on and over the next weeks decisions will be made for the next set of projects with the 25 million of funding available. A new research boat run by Geological Survey Unit has been launched. They do a lot of data collection that helps understanding going on Lake Erie. Director Mertz attended the Great Lakes Commission and participated in Great Lakes Day virtually, and talked about the GLRI funding and how it will be used.

Commissioner Diane Miller shared thanks for allowing them to host at University of Toledo. Noted Lake Erie Water Keepers are working with University of Toledo including Dr. Patrick Lawrence, City of Toledo, City of Oregon, Lucas County to put funding together for the Lake Erie report card that will go out a couple of years for now. Referenced work of Dr. Bill Hintz, Assistant Professor of Ecology at University of Toledo. Dr. Hintz put together studies related to road salt that were published nationally and the list is available to Commission staff to review research.

Commissioner Danielle Giannantonio shared federal updates on funding opportunities. USEPA released its IJA guidance yesterday, and she said congressional earmarks in appropriations bills were just released. These infrastructure projects will be complimentary to H2Ohio, GLRI, and other programs. The NEORSD CEO is testifying in front of the Senate EPW Committee on the SRF. There are discussions about changing the SRF formula based on population which wouldn't benefit Ohio.

Commissioner Bill Wolf mentioned reports from Dr. Bill Hintz about saline having a direct impact on zooplankton and is curious as to what the impact over time will be. Commodity prices are increasing, and farmers will be focused and targeted when it comes to nutrients they're applying to their soil.

Tim Hill reported on a partnership with Put-In-Bay Township Port Authority to repair Miller Ferry dock on South Bass Island, a nearly \$700,000 project. All work will be done within the current footprint of the dock on Miller Ferry Property so no disruption will occur. Miller Ferry will still be operational during construction. The facility will be updated to better accommodate tourism and traffic.

Gene Phillips reported that ODH is gearing up for beach water monitoring season along Lake Erie. ODH is finalizing contracts to get sample collections and analysis underway. Beach Water Quality Monitoring Data is available from last year in the Data Ohio Portal. The updated Fish Consumption Advisory Brochure is now available in both English and Spanish and is being distributed through various stakeholder organizations.

Director Dorothy Pelanda reported that within the H2Ohio Program they were able to add ten additional counties so that the entire Western Lake Erie Basin area can be and is enrolled in the H2Ohio Program. Last week, the Soil & Water District Offices held their annual convention, and ODA presented annual awards to a Soil & Water District Office, an Agricultural partner or retailer, and to an individual. This year's award went to the Henry County Soil & Water District Office because they were able to enroll 95% of

their acreage. The second award went to Legacy Cooperative, as they attended every one of the meetings and took it upon themselves to connect with producers within five counties in their areas to get them enrolled in the H2Ohio program. The individual award went to Steve Davis, a longtime partner at NRCS and supporter of conservation efforts. Currently in the basin, there are 1.6 million acres enrolled in the H2Ohio program. In 2022, two-stage ditches will be added. The biggest challenge with two-stage ditches is that they can become a problem if they are not properly monitored. Weather conditions prevented producers that signed up for winter cover crops from planting them on their farm, and ODA is looking at two possibilities to apply cover crops through planes or drones.

Director Laurie Stevenson reported on the Federal guidelines for distribution of federal IJJA funding and next steps for OEPA to receive that funding. OEPA is working to identify priorities and focus areas with partners related to supporting drinking and wastewater infrastructure development, especially in disadvantaged communities. Feedback will be requested to make sure work aligns with the Governor's priorities and interest in Lake Erie water quality and infrastructure development. H2Ohio funding has been announced for lead focused work including Cleveland and Cincinnati lead service line replacement in daycares. Their next focus is helping communities that need assistance with lead service line inventory and mapping.

### **Advisor/Partner Reports:**

Mark Smith—NRCS

Mark is the new tri-state Western Erie Basin Coordinator. John Wilson is new state conservationist replacing Terry Cosby who is now Chief. Three major RCCP proposals in Western Erie Basin that were awarded 2021 are moving forward with Ohio Department of Agriculture, one with Michigan and Indiana that serves the watershed, and RCCP project with OSU. Currently taking additional proposals for RCCP 2022 for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. NRCS has an open RFP for Climate Smart Grant proposals. They are working with ODA and ODNR to try and synchronize H2Ohio and their Wetlands Reserve Program to make the programs more successful. Continuing work on demonstrations farms in Hardin and Hancock County.

Tory Gabriel – Ohio Sea Grant

They are looking forward to hearing about fiscal year 2022 Sea Grant funding in the next few weeks. Stone Lab will be offering courses again this summer. The annual HAB forecast event is set for June 30 at Stone Lab. The Infrastructure bill contains \$15 million for national Sea Grant's work in marine debris and microplastics, and the spend plan is being determined but hopeful for \$250k per year for the next five years. Ohio Department of Higher Education Harmful Algae Blooms Research Initiative RFP are out. The Clean Marinas Program has installed two green infrastructure demonstration projects that will be monitored throughout the year, and a marina cleaning tool has been developed. In the plastics space, planning is occurring to place trash skimming devices in Lake Erie for the first time, and a plastics-free Put-In-Bay Day is being organized.

Kari Gerwin - TMACOG

They are working with local governments, business, universities, and stakeholders in NW Ohio on water quality planning, policy development, and regulatory compliance. There is a new grant funding projects that they are working over the next few years including Chloride work. This includes collaboration with Partners for Clean Stream on getting recommendations for best management practices into nonpoint source implementation strategies and working with local governments to improve salt applications practices. TMACOG received funding from USEPA to develop a water and wastewater workforce development initiative to develop a collaborative that will ensure that wastewater operations are preparing for retirements and replacing them with individuals that are trained in all emerging relevant issues/climate issues.

NOACA. Not in attendance, Lynn Garrity shared that NOACA wanted to make everyone aware the NOACA 208 Plan, the Water Quality and Wastewater Management Plan, was recently approved by US EPA and titled Clean Water 2020.

**Public Comment:** Interested parties are welcome to make a brief comment prior to the close of the meeting.

Tahree Lane with Lake Erie Water Keepers said Cooper Farms requested permit in the WLEB watershed that will add 7,350 hogs in Milford township which has two wetlands, a shallow water table, and close to residents. She mentioned that Lake Erie Water Keeper will be hosting its annual conference in Perrysburg on April 22. During her second part of her remarks, she was speaking on behalf of herself. She raised concerns about a new fish farm coming to Pioneer, Ohio from Aquabounty.

Dr. Michael Weintraub with the University of Toledo reported that originally, the Great Lakes was not going to be considered. Dept of Energy was going to have sites on the ocean sites. They were able to bring people here from NW Pacific National Lab and show them what was going on in the Great Lakes. This is going to be a 10-year project.

Dr. Bridgeman, forgot to mention Bill Hintz who is leading road salt project within the Maumee AOC that aims to reduce impacts of salt pollution on aquatic species in the AOC. Not something that used to be on our radar 10 years ago. Science and evidence shows that once salt gets into freshwater ecosystem they'll stay there for some time – levels being at 25% concentration of sea water. Project is aimed, locally/regionally, what salt concentration are and what management practices can we put in place to reduce the impact. Great collaboration with TMACOG and Partners of Clean Streams that research is being done.

Commissioner Stevenson moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Bill Wolf made a motion and Tim Stouffer seconded. A roll-call vote followed.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:24pm



Signature of Secretary: Mary Metz  
Date: 9/15/2022

Signature of Chair: Laurie A. Stevenson  
Date: 9/15/2022