

The Water Spout

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VOTERS APPROVE NEW RIGHTS FOR LAKE ERIE

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BY Julie Grant PUBLISHED March 1, 2019

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It Started with the 2014 Water Crisis

In August 2014, 500,000 people in Toledo and the surrounding region were told not to use their tap water for three days for drinking or cooking. Microcystin, a toxin from algae, had poisoned the city's water distribution system.

Toledo resident, Julian Mack couldn't believe it.

"It was like a scary movie," he said. "It was a struggle. At that point, they were telling us not to use the water to even bathe."

Mack remembers the FEMA trucks with water stationed at local school. His own family drove more than two hours to get cases of water.

"It became very obvious at that point in time how important water is to our everyday life," he said.

Mack, a community activist, has since been part of a newly-formed group, Toledoans for Safe Water. The group created the Lake Erie Bill of Rights, a city charter amendment giving the lake legal rights that citizens would be able to defend in court.

After years of legal wrangling, they finally got it on the ballot in Toledo in a February 26 special election. Mack was elated when it passed, by a vote of 61-to-39 percent.

"It was unbelievable, it was an unbelievable feeling," Mack said.

But, Joe Cornely, spokesperson for the Ohio Farm Bureau, which opposed the measure, points out that only 9-percent of registered voters actually cast ballots.

"Well, obviously we were disappointed," he said.

Farms Largely Blamed for Toxins in the Water

Runoff of fertilizer and manure from farms has been blamed for feeding the toxic algal blooms. Ohio has created two new laws since the 2014 algae crisis to control this problem, but it will still take many years to research and fix, according to Cornely.

“Trying to control complex problems at the ballot box is not the right way to do this,” he said.

The Lake Erie Bill of Rights grants new powers for Toledo residents to hold businesses and the government accountable for polluting the lake.

“Virtually any citizen of Toledo can claim that a farmer in any of 35 Ohio counties is doing damage to the lake, and then take them to court,” Cornely said.



Giving Lake Erie Its Own Legal Protections

Mari Margill, spokesperson for a non-profit law firm, the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, which helped concerned Toledo citizens develop the Bill of Rights, says people couldn't get the government and farmers to take action quickly enough to protect Lake Erie. That's why they moved to imbue the lake itself with rights.

“One of the things that this has done is brought this concept of really changing how nature is treated under the law, and the need to do that in order to protect it,” Margill said.

Communities around the world have started approving Rights of Nature laws to protect the environment, and a similar bill in Grant Township, Pennsylvania is currently being litigated.

The Lake Erie bill brought swift legal action from an Ohio farmer, whose attorney called the Toledo amendment “...an unlawful and unconstitutional assault on family farms.” Margill says supporters expected this, and will be deciding how to respond.

Water Matters: Green Landscaping

By Jacquelyn Buck

As spring approaches, homeowners throughout the county begin planning their garden and lawn care goals. Perhaps this year, the goal is to have more flowers decorating the house or less time spent mowing the grass. No matter the goal, it is our hope at Allen County Partnership for Water Quality (ACPWQ) that you keep water quality in mind.

Water quality is affected by every choice you make for your lawn and garden because rainwater does not abide by property lines. Every raindrop that moves across your property flows into the nearest body of water, such as a river, and eventually to the ocean. This is known as a



watershed. Interesting tidbit about watersheds: just because it is our discharge water, doesn't mean it isn't drinking water for someone else downstream. Therefore, it is our duty to protect what is going into our streams, which can start with how we care for our lawns. Here at ACPWQ, we like to suggest that our neighbors use **green** landscaping practices.

What do we mean by green landscaping practices? Will they be more costly? Be more time consuming?

For the most part no and no! What we mean by green landscaping is to plant **native plants** in your flowerbeds, plant a **rain garden**, use **rain barrels**, try **adding porous surfaces**, and **test your soil!**

- 💧 **Native Plants:** These plants require less fertilizer and water while also frequently being great for our local pollinators! Since the plant has evolved with the area, they are adapted to survive here without additional fertilizers, pesticides, and additional water needs. These plants and seeds can be purchased at local greenhouses throughout the county.
- 💧 **Rain Garden:** A rain garden is a small depression with native flowers and shrubs designed to collect and hold rainwater temporarily from driveways, homes, and lawns. These gardens are impressive filtering systems helping to trap runoff fertilizers, pesticides, sediments, and other pollutants that the rainwater collected from your lawn!
- 💧 **Rain Barrels:** Rain barrels are systems designed to catch and hold rainwater coming off your roof. This beneficial practice allows you to save water in two ways. First, it helps contain rainwater that would otherwise be rushing down your property line, adding to the likely overwhelmed combined sewer system and streams. Secondly, the water collected is there for your use of watering plants and gardens without having to ever turn on the tap or pull from a well.
- 💧 **Porous Surfaces:** Most of our driveways, rooftops, patios, and roads are made up of impermeable surfaces, or they do not let water through. We want our roof to protect us from the rain, but does it matter if our driveway is made up of permeable or non-permeable surfaces? Instead of using blacktop or concrete slabs, consider using gravel, pervious concrete payments or pavers. Instead of creating a cement patio, consider using a wooden deck! These simple adjustments allow rainwater to be absorbed into the ground, not forced into a stream.



- 💧 **Test Your Soil:** Perhaps one of the easiest ways to **green** up your lawn is to check what the soil pH and nutrient needs are before adding chemicals to your lawn and garden. These tests can be purchased for a low cost at big-box stores and can save you a lot of money in unnecessary chemicals! Additionally, they help water quality for all your neighbors downstream because you will be able to accurately fertilize your lawn without excess that ends up being washed away with rainwater.

This list is long, and will take time, but perhaps this year you work on installing one rain barrel and plant one native plant. If we each take one step, though seemingly insignificant, together add up to create **BIG** change!

New Hire

On November 26, 2018, Jacquelyn Buck began as a Water Quality Education Specialist for Allen County Partnership for Water Quality. Jacquelyn received her master degree from Miami University in Environmental Science with an area of concentration in environmental education in August 2018. She has worked at Newport Aquarium, Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo, and Science Central educating children and adults alike on the importance of the natural world and their role in protecting it.

Jacquelyn is excited for this new opportunity to allow her to continue her passion for informally educating on water quality and conservation issues in a city built on three rivers.

Since November, Jacquelyn has been working on updating brochures and the acwater.org website. In addition to these tasks, she has created a new program “Monthly Water Quality Tips” which involve both a “Water Matters” article and a colorful poster. This program started in March and will continue every month for the rest of the year. Lastly, she has recently begun drafting a public service announcement that will hopefully be airing sometime later this month.

Where Have We Been?

- ACPWQ has been making its way around the county trying to spread the word on water quality. So far in 2019, we have taken part in
 - January 15th-17th: Farm Show
 - February 2nd: New Haven World Wetland Day

Where Will We Go?

- ACPWQ will be heading to these events in the future. We hope to see you at:
 - April 13th: Girl Scouts Earth Day Extravaganza
 - April 22-23: Save Maumee Earth Day Event
 - April 25th: Allen County Neighborhoods Association
 - April 28th: Little River Wetland Project's Earth Day Event
 - June 24th: City Safari Day Camp