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July 12, 2019

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

I write to urge the acceleration of efforts to combat Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), as informed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) forecast of a significant harmful algal bloom in western Lake Erie in late July. Such a bloom may impact the health of the entire lake, including the eastern basin near my district in Buffalo, New York. As climate change increases the threat of algal blooms, our efforts must escalate proportionately.

Harmful algal blooms pose a serious threat to the health of the Great Lakes and the residents of Great Lakes communities. In Lake Erie, blooms consist of cyanobacteria, also known as blue-green algae, which endangers human health, wildlife, plant life and economic vitality. Buffalo's economic revitalization is intertwined with the restoration of Lake Erie, which helped leverage millions of dollars in public and private investment along the water's edge. The Economic Impact of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative shows that every \$1 spent on environmental restoration resulted in \$3.35 in additional economic activity. Algal blooms threaten the progress made in restoring our waters and our economy alike.

Factors that cause algal blooms are expected to increase as a result of climate change. Temperatures in some areas of the Great Lakes are projected to rise as much as 5 degrees by the end of the 21st century. Heavy downpours have increased across the Midwest and Northeast according to the National Climate Assessment. Increased precipitation results in additional pollution runoff into bodies of water, inserting phosphorous into the water and increasing the likelihood of harmful algal blooms. Lake Erie, the most shallow and warmest of the Great Lakes, is especially vulnerable.

While we know the factors that contribute to the formation of harmful algal blooms, how these factors come together to create a bloom is not well understood. Accelerating research efforts will provide critical information to combat blooms and protect Great Lakes communities. To do so, it is essential to prioritize combating harmful algal blooms, accelerate current efforts, and mitigate known causes and damage.

Specifically, I request that as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan III is drafted, an increased emphasis should be placed on the goal to “develop new or improved approaches for reducing or preventing harmful algal blooms.” In addition, efforts should be made to prioritize the goal of reducing the phosphorus targets in Lake Erie by 7.3 million pounds (40%) by 2025, as stated in the United States’ Action Plan for Lake Erie under the U.S.-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, in respect to these imminent threats. H.R. 3055, the 2019 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies House Appropriations bill, includes language encouraging the Environmental Protection Agency to conduct and support research to promote scientific progress towards preventing and controlling harmful algal blooms. I support the expeditious implementation of those programs in FY20 with an emphasis on Lake Erie.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Higgins" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress