

# TMACOG WLEB Water Quality Advisory Group Meeting

Thursday, January 8, 2026

10:00 am – 11:30 am

TMACOG Boardroom

300 Martin Luther King Jr Drive, Suite 300

Toledo, Ohio 43604

**Virtual Attendees: Jessica D'Ambrosio, Jordan Rofker, Sandra Kosek-Sills, Alexis McCarter, Kevin Nemer, Sandy Bihn, Scott Chalfin, Stephanie Singer, and Mike Libben.**

**In-person Attendees: Sarah Williams, Kris Barnswell, Todd Haggard, Wei Zhang, Gerald Bingham, Tahree Lane, Deanna Bobak, Jenny Carter-Cornell, Sara Guiher, Boden Fisher, Christina Kuchle, Ben Pushka, Melanie Knapp, Jesse Stock, Sally Gladwell**

**TMACOG Staff: Melissa Hopfer, Tiara Davis**

## Welcome and Introductions

- Melissa Hopfer welcomed everyone both in person and virtually and asked for roundtable introductions.
- Melissa provided an agenda overview.

## Guest Speaker

Harmful Algal Blooms: 2025 Lake Erie Season and Research Updates

Sara Guiher, Harmful Algal Bloom and Water Quality Specialist  
Ohio Sea Grant Extension

- Sara Guiher gave an overview of the 2025 algae bloom season and compared it to blooms from previous years.
- The bloom this year was the second mildest since 2008 (second only to the 2020 bloom).
- We are seeing a reduction in soluble phosphorus loads (6-10% reduction since the peak).
- The 2025 actual bloom was on the low end of the NOAA forecast
- There were a number of large rain events, but the overall season's precipitation was average.
- Great Lakes Center for Fresh Waters and Human Health is a forum for algal bloom researchers to share their research.
- Various research is occurring that is helping to determine thresholds, guide forecasting, identifying new toxins, the impacts of algal bloom toxins, identifying the aerosolization and transport of toxin, and assessing the effects of aerosolized HAB toxins on human.
- Harmful Algal Bloom research initiative focus areas: Track Blocks, produce safe drinking water, protect public health, and engaging stakeholders.

- Report highlights: measure incidence of colloidal phosphorus (not a significant source), examine effectiveness of UV treatment (effective for microcystin but not all toxins), compile and share clinical evidence of HAB toxin illness, explore the effect of dredge sediment on crops (no negative effect on crop yield and no accumulation).
- Nutrient reductions by source from certain programs such as H2Ohio are available but there is no comprehensive reduction by source
- The Harmful Algal Bloom Research Initiative relies on local organizations such as the OEPA, ODA, Lake Erie Commission, and Ohio Department of Health to establish their priorities.
- 2026 Stone Lab events: options for groups to visit the Stone Lab ->typically full day event with presentations and time for networking.
  - Is there interest for WLEB group to visit?

### **Staff Update**

#### 208 Plan Update Nonpoint Source Chapter

- Federally mandated document that TMACOG is required to regularly update and maintain. A comprehensive update of all chapters is ongoing.
- Goal: make this document something that various audiences can use.
- Melissa provided an overview of the new Non-Point Source Chapter outline.
  - Incorporate an infographic/timeline of the issues and responses developed to address them.
  - Moving to linking the actual research rather than a text-heavy document
- Melissa is asking for feedback on the outline
  - Are there any programs/policies missing from the history timeline
- Various members mentioned different programs and policies that should be included in the timeline
  - H2Ohio, 2029
  - [CWA/Maumee River TMDL](#) (website includes sub watershed info)
  - GLRI

#### Advocacy Tool Update

- Slowly on-going over the past year.
- A WQ form letter has been developed for the public to use as a letter to advocate for water quality policies and issues to legislators.
- Goal is to have the letter automatically send to legislators and make advocacy more accessible.
- The letter itself is drafted, TMACOG is looking at free programs that can autogenerate a letter.
- Not yet released but will need a system to get the word out, maybe share with Tom Henry at the Toledo Blade.
- Hope is to have it ready by the end of the Summer.

### NPS Planning Tool

- Melissa gave an overview of the Western Lake Erie Basin Implementation Mapping Tool to make informed decision-making through comprehensive data access and analysis.
- Purpose: enhance WQ project implementation
- Will be an interactive mapping tool to track NPS-IS plans development, updating, and project implementation and will also include potential nutrient sources, monitoring data, land use data, watershed modeling data, and currently implanted project.
- A pilot decision making process will also be designed alongside this tool.
- An application is being submitted for LEPF for funding. Funding decisions will be announced in April.

### Discussion of FY27 Annual Work Program

- Melissa gave a brief overview of the AWP and asked for feedback on how the group could facilitate discussions with NPS-IS partners.
- The biggest challenge in NPS-IS plans is getting landowners identified and involved in implementing projects.
- Collectively, are there other communication channels where this can be brought forward? Making connections is part of the work. Develop a presentation that can be used basin-wide?
- State of Ohio is going to be hosting an in-person Domestic Action Plan workshop at the State of the Science Conference this year.
- Township Trustees are often overlooked for outreach, and maybe some of the small mayors who could use assistance on understanding NPS-IS plans and the benefits in getting involved.

### Meeting Presentations and Site Visits

- Melissa asked for ideas for presentations or site visits for this year's AG meetings.
- She specifically asked if there was interest in doing a site tour centered around a NPS-IS plan to see how the plans get developed and how the projects get implemented. Kris Barnswell recommended connecting with Cherie Blair for suggestions.

### **Partner Updates**

- Ohio Sea Grant: next Master Rain Gardener program registration will be opening soon. The class runs first week of March through April. Ohio Sea Grant's Stone Lab is available for tours in the summer. Please reach out if you are interested in touring Stone Lab.
- Ohio Department of Agriculture: working with SWCDs to help producers continue to develop nutrient management plans. H2Ohio conservation ditch application is open on a rolling basis (this program funds the implementation of two stage ditches or overwide channels). County Engineer's and SWCDs are only applicants

(landowners can work with these entities on non-county-maintained ditches). Phosphorus filter program is on-going with efficacy monitoring on-going on select sites,

- ODNR: has \$10 million of funding that it has come into that can be used on nutrient reduction wetland projects. They have been working with conservation organizations to work with software development companies that are currently building data centers. These companies have committed to offsetting their water (Volumetric Water Benefit Accounting).
- Wood County SWCD: 151 producers enrolled (about 40% of crop land) in H2Ohio. Over 50 producers opted to not apply phosphorus on top of soil but into the soil. Submitted an LEPF for an updated Portage River study.
- Partners for Clean Streams: September 26<sup>th</sup> is 30<sup>th</sup> year of PCS Clean your Streams Day.
- Lake Erie Water Keeper: Dairy CAFO meeting at Wood County Fairgrounds next week. Ongoing manure issues across the Western Lake Erie Basin. Issues with well installations being too close to landfills

#### **Public Comments**

- No members of the public were present.

#### **Recommendations to Water Quality Council**

- None made.

#### **Adjourn**

2026 Meeting Dates: Jan 8, Apr 9, Jul 9, Oct 8