**BAO Report**

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**New Ohio water coalition to poll public**

By Nyla Hughes, Great Lakes Echo

A coalition of Ohio farm, industry, government and environmental groups is rolling out a poll next week to assess which water issues are most important to the public.

The new group is called Healthy Water Ohio or [HwO](http://healthywaterohio.org/). Its mission is to improve water supply, quality and treatment.

The group’s steering committee will use the poll and focus groups to plan how to resolve Ohio water problems within the next 20-30 years, said John Stark, freshwater director for The Nature Conservancy.

Because the eight counties along Lake Erie generates $38 billion in tourism for Ohio each year, HwO is concerned about water shortages, said Larry Fletcher,the executive director of Lake Erie Shores & Islands, a travel agency that belongs to the coalition.

“Ohioan consumers may have to spend tax dollars on water treatment,” said Fletcher.

HwO is also worried about the rate at which water is consumed, said Larry Antosch, the senior director of environmental policy for Ohio Farm Bureau and the coalition’s technical adviser. Industrial production and electrical power use most of the water and alternative energy sources will be discussed.

“Water withdrawn is 10-20 percent consumption, so we need to make sure there is an adequate supply,” said Antosch. “We may look at extracting oil or the cooling water aspect in the future.”

Sandy Bihn, WaterKeeper of the Western Lake Erie Waterkeeper Association, said that Lake Erie is most vulnerable to water shortages and algae blooms. Farm practices that cause them should be the coalition’s top priority, she said.

“Lake Erie is an indication how it’s getting worse because it’s shallow,” Bihn said. “I wish they were investing in policies that protect resources. It would help if there was something in the ditches that would capture nutrients or manure run off before they enter Lake Erie.”

The steering committee plans to meet two to three times a year. The findings and recommendations will be announced by summer 2015, Stark said.

Members of the new group include representatives of these organizations:

Anheuser-Busch

Association of Ohio Health Commissioners

Environmental Defense Fund

Farm Credit Mid-America

Muskingum Conservancy District

Ohio Aggregates and Industrial Minerals Association

Ohio Agribusiness Association

Ohio Cattlemen’s Association

Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association

Ohio Dairy Producers Association

Ohio Farm Bureau Federation

Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Ohio League of Conservation Voters

Ohio Livestock Coalition

Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association

Ohio Pork Producers Council

Ohio Produce Growers and Marketers Association

Ohio Rural Water Association

Ohio Sheep Improvement Association

Ohio Soft Drink Association

Ohio Soybean Council

Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

Ohio State University Extension

Ohio State University Office of Research

Ohio State University Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center

Price Farms Organics

ScottsMiracle-Gro

The Nature Conservancy

United Producers, Inc.

Village of Ottawa