**BAO Report**

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**'Significant' algal bloom forecast, but not as bad as 2013 sliming of Lake Erie**

By D’Arcy Egan, The Plain Dealer

Significant algal blooms will return to Western Lake Erie in the coming weeks, according to a NOAA forecast released Thursday at Ohio Sea Grant's Stone Laboratory.

The bloom isn't expected to be as devastating as the 2011 episode, with the early forecast predicting it will be a small notch below 2013.

Researchers acknowledged they were wrong making late year's prediction, with the bloom much larger than expected.

The harmful algal blooms (HABs) plaguing Lake Erie the past few years have become problematic for tourism officials and sport fishing interests around the western end of the lake. The late summer blooms have chased away boaters, fishermen and other visitors all around the big lake, even though last year's blooms were generally confined to Western Lake Erie.

NOAA and its research partners predicted a "significant bloom of cyanobacteria," a toxic blue-green algae, for late summer and early fall around Western Lake Erie. They do not expect the HABs to be as noxious around Cleveland and the deeper Central Basin of Lake Erie in August and September, the prime months for the algal blooms, as they were in 2011.

"The algal blooms in 2011 were the worse we'd seen, and would be rated a 10 on a scale of 10," said Richard Stumpf, NOAA's ecological forecasting applied research lead at the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science. "We severely underestimated the 2013 bloom for a variety of reasons, but we don't think this year's bloom will be quite as bad."

Stumpf rated the 2013 bloom as an 8. He said this year's bloom should be a 5 or 6 on the NOAA scale. Researchers will update the 2014 prediction the first week of August.

"This NOAA model (for forecasting HABs) has been incredibly valuable to us as we work to eliminate the blooms to protect human health, the Lake Erie ecosystem and its coastal economy," said Director Jeff Reutter of Ohio State University's Sea Grant program. Information from the NOAA model has helped target the amount of phosphorus going into the lake (and) help to reduce or eliminate the HABs, he said.