AYC Ecology North

January 2015

**Ohio receives federal money to battle Lake Erie algal blooms**

**Money aimed at reducing phosphorus from farm runoff**

By Tom Jackson, Sandusky Register

Ohio has received a new federal grant of about $12 million for farm conservation, targeted at reducing runoff that puts phosphorus into western Lake Erie and feeds harmful algal blooms.

The Tri-State Western Lake Erie Basin Phosphorus Reduction Initiative received $17.5 million under the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

The money goes to Michigan, Indiana and Ohio, but Ohio will get 70 percent, based on the amount of agricultural land it has within the Lake Erie basin, with 18 percent going to Michigan and 12 percent going to Indiana, said Jennifer Holton. She is a spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Agricultural and Rural Development, the lead agency for the tri-state grant.

A USDA summary explaining the grant says, "A diverse team of partners will use a targeted approach to identify high-priority sub-watersheds for phosphorus reduction and increase farmer access to public and private technical assistance — including innovative demonstrations of practices that NRCS does not yet cover — in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana. Identified actions are coordinated with the Ohio Phosphorus Task Force Report and will move Lake Erie toward goals developed in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement Annex 4 Nutrient Strategies. The partners will gauge success and monitor results using project-wide water quality monitoring and watershed modeling conducted by national experts from multiple scientific entities and institutions."

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the grants Wednesday.

The federal program is providing more than $370 million across the country to 115 projects. More than 20 of the projects are being carried out in the Great Lakes states of Ohio, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. The projects are being matched with local funds on a one to one basis, raising total funding for more than $740 million.

Todd Ambs, campaign director for the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, said he's pleased much of the federal money will be aimed at fixing Great Lakes problems, including the harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie.

“Reducing nutrient runoff has always been a priority for Great Lakes restoration, but the toxic algal bloom that poisoned drinking water for more than 400,000 people in the greater Toledo area last summer has underscored the urgency of this issue,” Ambs said.

“These projects will reduce sediment and nutrient build up, produce results that can be replicated in other parts of the Great Lakes, and move us closer to the goal of waters that are always safe for drinking, swimming, and fishing. And these projects won’t just help residents of the lakes—they will directly benefit farmers by helping to conserve soil health," Ambs said