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Ohio higher ed spending millions on algae fight

Projects put scholars to work studying water safety, runoff, policy

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Another \$4 million in new money is being dedicated to fighting western Lake Erie algae, nearly half of that sum coming from the Ohio Board of Regents.

Projects are being funded in five focus areas: harmful Lake Erie algal blooms and water quality; safe drinking water testing and technology; land-use practices aimed at reducing nutrient runoff; human health and toxicity studies, and economics and policy.

Combined funding ranges from \$400,000 to \$1 million for each subject area.

The research is being done by more than 60 scientists. Ohio colleges and universities represented include the University of Toledo, Bowling Green State University, Defiance College, Heidelberg University, Ohio State University, Kent State University, the University of Cincinnati, and Central State University.

Ohio colleges and universities have committed nearly \$2.1 million and the state Board of Regents is committing \$2 million.

Board of Regents Chancellor John Carey said the collaborative effort “is evidence of the value of higher education in Ohio to solving the toxic algae issue.”

“We need to build upon this model with other important issues facing our state,” Mr. Carey said.

One project, headed by UT algae researcher Tom Bridgeman, will test the capability of algae-detecting sensors 8 miles from water intakes to give water-treatment plants more time to prepare for algae headed their way.

That project got support from several people in writing, including Toledo Mayor D. Michael Collins, who said in his Dec. 10 letter to Mr. Carey that Mr. Bridgeman's research could "provide even greater lead time, allowing us the extra advantage of more time to activate those treatments."

The city installed its first real-time sensors at its water-intake crib and its low service pump station in August, immediately after the crisis that left nearly 500,000 of the city's customers without safe tap water the first weekend of that month.

Oregon Mayor Michael J. Seferian said in a Dec. 9 letter that those sensors Toledo installed in August have already provided valuable data on harmful algae bloom concentrations and that an advance notification system could be better developed with more sensors in Maumee Bay.

Larry Liou, project manager of the space science office at NASA's Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, said in a Dec. 5 letter that NASA intends to keep collaborating on that research with data it collects from the sky. And Timothy Davis, a scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory in Ann Arbor, said his staff would be happy to help place an algae-detection buoy near the Sandusky intake.

Edward A. Moore, Toledo public utilities director, said his department strongly supports four research projects related to the science of producing safe drinking water. He cited proposals from UT's Isabel Escobar, Ohio State's John Lehnart, and University of Cincinnati scientists.

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