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## Watered-down pact

OHIO belongs to the Great Lakes Compact, a group of eight states that joined in 2008 to work with two Canadian provinces on regional approaches to vital issues of water quality, conservation, and management in the lakes' basin.

Instead, leaders of the Republican-controlled state House and Senate seek to do the bidding of business and industry lobbies - including the Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce - that have given themselves the Orwellian title "Coalition for Sustainable Water Management." Lawmakers are working to ram through bills that would threaten surface and ground water affecting Lake Erie.

In the name of creating jobs and promoting economic development, the measures would jeopardize as many as 250,000 tourism jobs that depend on a clean and thriving Lake Erie. That shouldn't happen.

The bills, sponsored in the House by Rep. Lynn Wachtmann (R., Napoleon) and in the Senate by Sen. Tim Grendell (R., Chesterland), would regulate withdrawals of water from streams only if they are listed in the outdated Gazetteer of Ohio Streams. Environmental groups note that definition would leave 80 percent of the state's streams - and the drinking water of nearly 3 million Ohioans - unprotected.

The measures would require an industrial facility to get a state permit only if it uses or withdraws at least 5 million gallons a day from Lake Erie or one of its key rivers, 2 million gallons a day from a stream or river "not of high water quality," or 300,000 gallons from small, high-quality rivers and streams. No other state in the Great Lakes Compact has such artificially high regulatory thresholds.

The likely results: greater concentrations of water pollution, including algae blooms; dangerously low water levels in coastal areas, and higher consumer costs for water and wastewater treatment. The flat, one-time permit fees would favor the largest water consumers.

The proposed legislation would conflict with, not support, Great Lakes Compact standards for water conservation, use, and withdrawal. Its voluntary conservation program is so limited as to have little value. It would give lawmakers unwarranted veto power over executive-branch water

regulation - not that the Kasich administration's Department of Natural Resources is objecting. A better approach would regulate water management on the basis of science rather than politics. It would base proper levels of water use and withdrawal on the size and quality of a stream compared with other water supplies in an area.

Legislation sponsored by state Rep. Dennis Murray (D., Sandusky) would do that. It has the support of environmental and small-business groups. But the General Assembly's GOP majority instead appears poised to pass business-friendly legislation without the nuisances of extensive hearings or public debate.

Lake Erie adds more than \$10 billion a year to the Ohio economy in revenues from tourism, sport and commercial fishing, boating, and wildlife-related activities. Yet its flow of incoming water is the lowest of the Great Lakes.

Measures that would jeopardize Lake Erie's economic contribution - and the jobs it supports - as well as the environmental values of the Great Lakes Compact will not benefit the vast majority of Ohio's residents or future generations. They should not become law.