



Fact Sheet

Great Lakes Ballast Water Management

Every ship contains a threat of new invaders

Our Great Lakes



The Great Lakes are a natural wonder of the world, holding 95% of our nation’s and 20% of our world’s fresh water supply. For the people of the Great Lakes states, they hold the key to our economic health, our recreation, and irreplaceable family experiences.

The Great Lakes have reached a tipping point and they need our help to defend them from such threats as invasive species that threaten food webs and that burden state and local governments with multi-million dollar clean-up efforts.

The Problem

Ohio’s Great Lake, Lake Erie, continues to fall under assault from invasive species.

One of the most recent, viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS), caused fish kills in Lake Erie and precipitated an interstate and intrastate fish transport ban that hurt small businesses. Unfortunately for Ohio, VHS is only one of the latest in a long string of once foreign and now-familiar names: zebra mussel, quagga mussel, spiny water flea, and dozens of others.

The source of these invaders? Ballast water from ships entering the Great Lakes from the ocean – many from other countries. Since 1959, when the St. Lawrence Seaway opened the lakes to ocean shipping, 65% of invasive species in the Great Lakes have been attributed to ballast water release. Ships use ballast water to provide stability when they are not carrying any cargo. As they take on cargo, ships dump their ballast water, along with any living organisms remaining in their ballast holds.

Negative Impact



Live transport of biological pollution into the state of Ohio is possible due to lack of effective regulation of the discharge of ballast water from ocean-going ships.

The negative impacts from dumping ballast water into the Great Lakes are nearly immeasurable. Native fish and other aquatic wildlife are out-competed for food and habitat, causing declining populations of native commercial and sport fisheries and requiring the use of perpetual stocking programs for decades.

Furthermore, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates put national utility and manufacturing costs related to zebra mussels alone at \$5 billion over the next ten years.

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Despite continuing entreaties from Great Lakes states, the federal government continues to delay protection of the Great Lakes from ballast water – a significant threat to our outdoor way of life.

Voluntary measures enforced by the U.S. Coast Guard are no match for the continuing flow of species into Lake Erie.

Ineffective Regulations

A few ships entering the Great Lakes undertake moderately effective ballast water exchange on the open ocean.

Unfortunately, the vast majority bypass regulations entirely and bring tons of sludge containing live organisms into

Lake Erie. Every ship contains the threat of new invaders.

Meanwhile, Ohio internalizes the economic and recreational impacts being brought to our shores from outside our state borders.

Proposed Action

To address this growing threat to Lake Erie and other Great Lakes, the OEC urges federal ballast water legislation that:

- » requires the use of the best-available technology as soon as the technology is available;
- » establishes a strong discharge standard that, at the minimum, meets the International Maritime Organization ballast water guidelines;

- » sets a deadline of 2011 for treatment compliance in order to protect the Great Lakes and U.S. waters from new invaders;
- » requires treatment for residuals on ships claiming no ballast on board;
- » will not pre-empt states from taking more protective measures.

What You Can Do

Contact your federal elected officials at 1 (800) 839-5276 and urge them to pass meaningful ballast water legislation that includes the actions above.

For more information
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