

## Matt Fisher & Jim Stouffer Recognized for Lake Erie Leadership

Lake Erie Foundation's own Matt Fisher and Jim Stouffer were honored this September with the Superior Leadership Award from Ohio Sea Grant and Stone Laboratory at The Ohio State University.

This award recognizes individuals who demonstrate exceptional leadership in identifying Lake Erie issues and rallying science, collaboration, and community support to address them. Matt and Jim were celebrated for their steadfast dedication to protecting and restoring the lake and its watershed—particularly for their work to elevate Lake Erie's importance across state and regional partners.

As the plaque reads, "We have all benefitted greatly from your selfless dedication and commitment to enhancing the value of the Great Lakes."

We're proud to see their vision and advocacy recognized by one of the region's most respected institutions.



## The Season of Giving

As the year draws to a close, we're reminded of the importance of generosity and stewardship. Your contributions, no matter the size, directly support LEF's mission to protect and restore Lake Erie through science, education, and advocacy.

Every donation helps us fund vital projects like wetland restoration, nutrient reduction initiatives, and public education programs. When you give, you're investing in clean water, thriving communities, and a healthier future for everyone who depends on the lake.

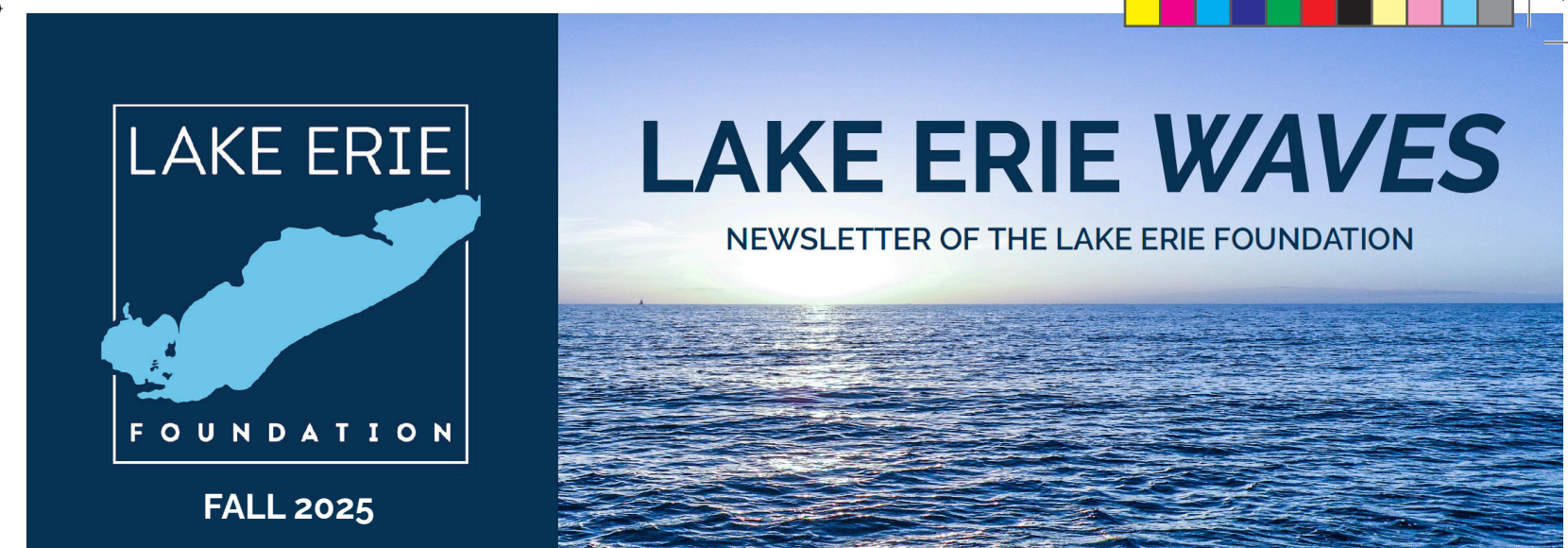
Please consider making an end-of-year tax-deductible gift today to help us continue our momentum into 2026. Donate at [LakeErieFoundation.org](http://LakeErieFoundation.org). Together, we can keep Lake Erie clean, vibrant, and protected for generations to come.



236 Walnut Ave  
Lakeside, Ohio 43440

## Join LEF Today

Become a member of Lake Erie Foundation (LEF) and help us restore and protect Lake Erie for generations to come. Your tax-deductible contribution will help LEF work to ensure that Lake Erie's waters are safe for drinking, fishing and swimming. Your support makes our efforts for advocating, educating, supporting innovative technology development, and legal defense a possibility. For more information regarding membership, visit LEF's website at [www.LakeErieFoundation.org](http://www.LakeErieFoundation.org) or call 419-301-3743.



## From the President

Dear Friends of Lake Erie,

As we bid farewell to summer and welcome the beauty of fall, this seasonal change reminds us to pause and appreciate all that Lake Erie provides. Our Great Lake offers endless opportunities for enjoyment, inspiration, and connection — treasures we must preserve and protect.

At Lake Erie Foundation (LEF), our commitment to protecting and preserving Lake Erie remains steadfast. I'm proud of what our organization has accomplished and profoundly grateful for the individuals who give their time, energy, and financial support to advance our mission.

This year, LEF was honored to be selected as a beneficiary by several generous partners. We extend heartfelt thanks to Legacy Foundation Group and Clemons Boats for their meaningful contributions and continued support of our work.

In August, LEF participated in Lake Erie Awareness Day (LEAD) on South Bass Island — marking our fifth year at this important event. Thanks to the leadership of Board Member Peter Huston, LEAD gives us a wonderful opportunity to engage with families and individuals interested in key topics such as microplastics, algal blooms, and invasive species.

Lake Erie Foundation was proud to sponsor the Understanding Algal Blooms: State of the Science Conference, held on September 11 at the University of Toledo Medical Campus. The event featured a wide range of presentations, with key takeaways including updates on Maumee River loading, the 2025 bloom forecast, the impacts of algal toxins on human health, and lessons learned from other systems facing similar challenges.

OSU partner Jay Martin and LEF Board Member and Ohio Sea Grant Director Chris Winslow served as moderators for the event. This year's conference showcased one of the broadest arrays of topics to date—from public health issues related to HABs to a presentation by Theresa Dirksen of Mercer County highlighting the significant progress being made to reduce phosphorus runoff and improve the water quality of Grand Lake St. Marys.

Presenters included representatives from NOAA, the Ohio Department of Agriculture, and Ohio State University Extension. It was a valuable event for LEF Board members to attend.

You can join our growing community of lake advocates by becoming a member or donor today. Memberships start at just \$25, and donations of any amount make a real difference. You may give using the enclosed envelope or online at [www.lakeeriefoundation.org](http://www.lakeeriefoundation.org). LEF receives no government funding and we rely entirely on the generosity of individuals, grants, and sponsorships to sustain our operations. Your support ensures that we can continue this vital work for generations to come.

Only a few short years ago, a small group of passionate individuals came together to create the Lake Erie Foundation. Since then, we've made remarkable progress — raising awareness about the challenges our lake faces and advancing innovative solutions. To our members, donors, and board: thank you for your dedication, generosity, and shared commitment. The work can be challenging, but together, we are making a meaningful difference.

As always, thank you for your confidence in our mission and for being a steward of Lake Erie. We welcome your thoughts and suggestions, please reach out anytime at [info@LakeErieFoundation.org](mailto:info@LakeErieFoundation.org).

Sincerely,

Jim Stouffer



**PUBLISHED BY:**

Lake Erie Foundation  
236 Walnut Ave  
Lakeside, Ohio 43440  
419-301-3743  
www.lakeeriefoundation.org

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:**

**President** Jim Stouffer  
**Vice President** Matt Fisher  
**Secretary** Lee Alexakos  
**Treasurer** Larry Fletcher  
**Board Member** Ron Wyss

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Ken Alvey  
Rick Graham  
Peter Huston  
Paul Klein  
John Lipaj  
Leonard Partin  
Dr. Chris Winslow  
Ron Wyss

**BOARD ADVISORS**

Keleen McDevitt  
John Hull  
Al Nickles

**MANAGING DIRECTOR**

Mary Margaret Lavelle



**Phosphorus Filter Project Making Waves**

One of the most exciting projects underway this year is the Phosphorus Filter Project in the Defiance, Ohio area. This initiative focuses on identifying high-phosphorus fields and installing edge-of-field filters designed to capture excess phosphorus before it reaches nearby waterways.

Lake Erie Foundation secured funding through the One-Time Strategic Community Fund to support this effort. Working alongside an outstanding team—Jay Martin of Flint Engineering, Clint Nestor, Chad Penn, and the City of Defiance, led by Jen English—LEF has made great strides in developing a replicable model for nutrient reduction.

Our goal is simple: to keep phosphorus out of Lake Erie, reduce harmful algal blooms, and protect clean water for generations to come. We're proving that targeted solutions can deliver meaningful, measurable results for our lake's health.

**Microplastics: A Growing Threat to Lake Erie**

It's hard to imagine that something so small could cause such a big problem. But microplastics—tiny plastic particles less than five millimeters in size—are rapidly becoming one of the most concerning pollutants in Lake Erie and across the Great Lakes.

Microplastics come from the everyday plastics we use and throw away. Water bottles, food wrappers, grocery bags, and even clothing made from synthetic fibers slowly break down over time into smaller and smaller pieces. These fragments never truly disappear; instead, they end up in our waterways, where wind, rain, and storm drains carry them directly into the lake. Once there, they're nearly impossible to remove.

Scientists have now found microplastics everywhere in Lake Erie's ecosystem—from the surface water and shorelines to the lakebed sediment and even inside the fish and mussels that live there. These plastics can act like sponges, absorbing toxins and chemicals, which can then make their way up the food chain. The long-term effects on human health are still being studied, but the implications are troubling.

It's estimated that Lake Erie has some of the highest concentrations of microplastics among all the Great Lakes, largely because of its dense coastal population and industrial activity. Single-use plastics—items designed to be used once and thrown away—are a major part of the problem.

The good news is that this is a challenge we can all help solve. Small changes make a real difference. Choose reusable bottles, coffee cups, and grocery bags. Skip plastic straws and utensils. Support businesses and legislation that reduce plastic waste and promote sustainable alternatives.

Lake Erie Foundation continues to advocate for policies that reduce plastic pollution at its source while educating the public on how individual actions can add up to meaningful change.

Protecting Lake Erie starts with the choices we make every day—because when it comes to the health of our lake, there's no such thing as "throwing it away."

**Celebrating Our Generous Supporters**

Lake Erie Foundation is deeply grateful for the ongoing generosity and partnership of Clemons Boats and The Legacy Group, two organizations whose commitment to Lake Erie continues to make a lasting impact.

Clemons Boats, a longtime Champion of Lake Erie sponsor, once again demonstrated its dedication to the lake through its annual Customer Appreciation Day. The event not only celebrated their loyal customers but also raised awareness and support for LEF's mission. Jason Clemons and his team continue to lead by example, showing how a family business built on a love for boating can help drive meaningful change for the health of our lake.

We are also honored to recognize The Legacy Group, founded by Tommy Weilbacher, for their exceptional generosity and support. Tommy, a lifelong Lake Erie enthusiast, grew up spending summers on the water and remains passionate about protecting it for future generations. Through The Legacy Group, Tommy launched WIIC, an annual event at Catawba Island Club that brings together leaders from across the healthcare industry to learn about the lake's importance, foster environmental awareness, and inspire collective stewardship.

Both Clemons Boats and The Legacy Group embody what it means to give back to the community that surrounds Lake Erie. Their leadership, generosity, and shared belief in leaving the next generation a cleaner, healthier lake remind us why this work matters so deeply.

From all of us at LEF, thank you for standing with us and for Lake Erie.



**Restoring Wetlands: Nature's Defense for a Healthier Lake Erie**

When it comes to protecting Lake Erie, few solutions are as effective—or as elegant—as wetlands. Sometimes called "nature's kidneys," wetlands filter pollutants, slow down stormwater, and create vital habitat for wildlife. They trap phosphorus and sediment before they can flow into our waterways, reducing the risk of harmful algal blooms (HABs) that affect drinking water, tourism, and recreation.

Unfortunately, more than 90 percent of Ohio's original wetlands have been drained or destroyed since the 1800s, largely for agriculture and development. That loss has left Lake Erie and its watershed more vulnerable to pollution and flooding. Every time it rains, nutrients and runoff move quickly across the land, carrying phosphorus into rivers and streams that feed the lake.

The good news: restoration works. Through the H2Ohio program, state agencies, universities, conservation organizations, and local partners are restoring and expanding wetlands across northwest Ohio. These projects range from small marsh enhancements along the coast to large floodplain reconnections that restore entire ecosystems. Each site improves water quality, supports biodiversity, and creates spaces for people to learn and connect with nature.

Lake Erie Foundation is proud to advocate for these efforts—and for continued investment in science-based solutions. Despite recent budget cuts to H2Ohio, LEF remains committed to ensuring wetland projects stay on track. The results speak for themselves: restored wetlands have already prevented thousands of pounds of phosphorus from entering Lake Erie, helping reduce the intensity and frequency of HABs.

Beyond water quality, wetlands offer something deeper: resilience. They give migratory birds a place to rest, protect communities from flooding, and sustain the natural beauty that draws so many of us to Lake Erie in the first place.

As we look ahead, LEF will continue to champion the protection and expansion of wetlands as a cornerstone of a cleaner, healthier lake. By supporting these projects, members and donors like you help ensure that Lake Erie—and all who depend on it—will thrive for generations to come.

