



PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES

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TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Lori Weigel
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RE: Ohio Voters Support Increase in Funding for Water Clean-up and Restoration;
Concern about Lake Erie Higher Today than Following 2014 Algae Bloom

DATE: May 16, 2017

The bipartisan research team of Public Opinion Strategies (R) and Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) recently completed a statistically valid and representative survey of voters throughout Ohio.¹ The survey results show that **more than four-in-five Buckeye state voters support dedicating \$1 billion to address the state's water quality problems**. Support is significant among all demographic, geographic and partisan sub-groups in the state. In fact, 90 percent agree that “even given a decline in state revenues, the Ohio state budget should include funding for water clean-up and lake restoration efforts.”

Moreover, 84 percent of voters are willing to pay ten dollars or more in increased taxes or fees to fund water restoration in Ohio. Again, willingness to pay is significant across the partisan spectrum and throughout the state. Even after hearing viewpoints on both sides, voters side with supporters of increasing fees to fund water restoration by nearly a three-to-one margin.

Voters provided a myriad of reasons for this support and willingness to pay, including that lakes, rivers and creeks are resources to protect for future generations, important economically, and important to

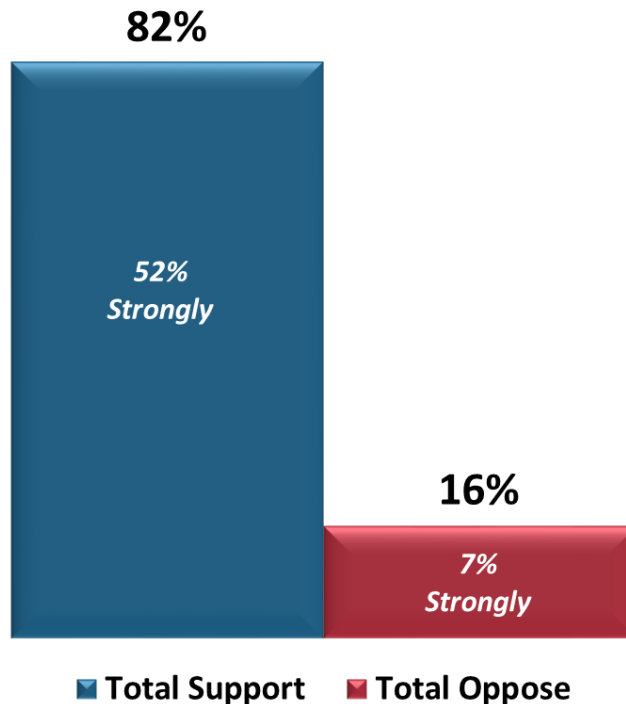
¹ **Methodology:** From April 25-30, 2017, Public Opinion Strategies and Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates completed 600 telephone interviews with registered voters in Ohio, with the sample approximating the demographic and partisan representation of those who voted in the November 2016 presidential election. The margin of sampling error for the statewide sample is +/-4.0%. Margins of sampling error for subgroups within the sample will be larger. Some percentages may sum to more than 100% due to rounding.

local communities. State residents place a high level of importance on ensuring that funding is dedicated to protecting sources of drinking water, and helping farmers to meet strong standards to keep pollution from flowing into rivers, streams, and Lake Erie. In fact, for the latter, more voters today say that pollution of Lake Erie is a very serious problem than did so in 2014, following the algae blooms that disrupted Toledo’s drinking water.

Among the key specific findings of the survey are the following:

- **Nearly nine-in ten Buckeye state voters support the Legislature dedicating \$1 billion over ten years to water clean-up and restoration of lakes, rivers and streams throughout the state.** Fully 82 percent of Ohio voters say they support the State Legislature dedicating “one hundred million dollars per year for ten years in order to target the root causes of water pollution in the state. The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency would provide grants to public and private groups to address water problems through actions such as helping Ohio farmers reduce run-off of fertilizers or animal waste or helping counties or local communities restore wetlands or reduce polluted run-off from streets.” More than half (52 percent) stand strongly in support, as one can see in the following graph. Opposition is fairly minimal.

Dedication of \$1 billion for water



- **Support for this significant dedication of funds for water clean-up and restoration of lakes, rivers and streams in the state is widespread and broad-based.** Majorities of all key subgroups of the electorate statewide express this sentiment, including:
 - 84 percent of women and 81 percent of men;
 - 93 percent of city voters, 83 percent of suburbanites, 81 percent of small town residents, and 73 percent of rural residents;
 - 80 percent of Whites and 92 percent of voters of color;
 - 90 percent of voters under age 35, 82 percent of 35-44 year olds, 89 percent of 45-54 year olds, 75 percent of 55-64 year olds, and 79 percent of seniors;
 - 93 percent of Democrats, 84 percent of independents, and 68 percent of GOP voters;
 - 87 percent of those residing in counties adjacent to Lake Erie; and
 - 87 percent of those in the Cleveland media market, 86 percent in the Cincinnati market, 82 percent in Columbus market, 83 percent in the Dayton market, and 71 percent in the rest of the state.
- **Even if the state budget is declining, voters say funding for water should still be included.** Fully nine-in-ten (90 percent) agree that ““even given a decline in state revenues, the Ohio state budget should include funding for water clean-up and lake restoration efforts.” This view cuts across party lines, geographic areas and demographics. In fact, 83 percent of Republicans, 89 percent of independents, and 99 percent of Democrats agree with this view.
- **The vast majority of voters are willing to pay \$10 or more in increased taxes or fees to fund water restoration in Ohio.** Fully 84 percent say they would be willing to pay that amount or greater each year in order to help fund these restoration efforts. In fact, 44 percent are willing to pay \$50 or more.
- **Given two opposing viewpoints, Ohio voters overwhelmingly side with supporters of increasing funding for water over critics.** As the following chart depicts, there is no contest between a supportive rationale for increasing funding, and a criticism that says that in part details the investments the state has already made in this arena.

(Some/Other) people say that we should support increasing funding to improve water quality, because nothing is more important than having clean water to drink and reducing pollution sources is more cost effective than upgrading water treatment. Ohio has one of the nation's most polluted rivers, and algae in lakes which not only hurts drinking water but closes beaches, and hurts fish and wildlife.

Statewide

70%

(Other/Some) people say that we should oppose increasing funding to improve water quality, because the state of Ohio has invested more than 3.6 billion dollars for infrastructure to improve water quality and waste water treatment already. Proposals to spend more would have little meaningful impact on a significant state commitment. It would be a drop in the bucket toward the progress we have already made.

Statewide

25%

- **A majority say they would view their State Legislator more favorably if he or she supported increasing water funding.** A majority of 56 percent say they would feel more favorably, while a mere five percent would feel less favorably, and another 38 percent say it would not affect how they feel about their Legislator.
- **State residents place a high level of importance on all of the major categories of where funding would be directed.** As the next graph illustrates, voters say that every single funding category is personally very important to them:

Potential Items That Could Be Funded Ranked By Extremely Important

	Extremely Important	Extremely/Very Important
Protecting sources of drinking water	86%	98%
Helping communities upgrade wastewater treatment to reduce pollution	70%	95%
Helping farmers to meet strong standards to keep pollution from flowing into rivers, streams, and Lake Erie	66%	94%
Restoring wetlands to naturally filter out water pollution	58%	92%

- **Support for increasing funding for water is grounded in the grave concerns that voters express about pollution, particularly in Lake Erie.** In fact, 65 percent say that pollution of Lake Erie is an extremely or very serious problem, with 90 percent saying it is at least somewhat serious issue. Concern about pollution of Lake Erie is six points higher today than it was in August 2014, following the algae blooms that shut down Toledo’s drinking water supplies. That said, a broader concern about pollution of lakes, rivers and streams overall is nearly this intense, as 60 percent say that is an extremely or very serious problem as well (90 percent at least somewhat serious).
- **Ohio’s waterways are important to Buckeye state voters for wide range of reasons.** Voters ascribe a number of very positive attributes to lakes, rivers and streams near them:
 - Fully 93 percent characterize them as a “resource we should protect for future generations;”
 - 82 percent have hope that they “can be cleaned up;”
 - 78 percent say they are very important to people in (their) community; and
 - 77 percent similarly say they are important economically.

In conclusion, this survey reveals the extent to which voters raise concerns about the water quality not only of Lake Erie, but all the lakes, rivers and streams in their state and their desire to clean them up and restore them. There is overwhelming support for a significant investment in doing just that through a one billion dollar injection of funds. This support is throughout the state and across party lines. Moreover, most voters are personally willing to pay more each year in taxes or fees in order to help with this effort. They are not dissuaded by criticisms of such investment, and say that a State Legislator who supports the increased funding will be held harmless and accrue positive regard among the majority of voters in the state.