

Ohio Marine Trades Association  
and Government Advantage Group

# LEGISLATIVE REPORT

DECEMBER 2025



## Sturgeon Reintroduction

The Ohio Division of Wildlife expanded its lake sturgeon reintroduction program in 2025 by releasing juvenile sturgeon into three new rivers: the Cuyahoga, Sandusky, and Scioto. These efforts, along with ongoing releases in the Maumee River, are part of a regional partnership involving the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Toledo Zoo, and The Ohio State University.

In total, 5,780 juvenile sturgeons (6–8 inches long) were released:

- Cuyahoga River: 2,000
- Maumee River: 3,000 during Sturgeon Fest
- Sandusky River: 750
- Scioto River: 30 tagged for monitoring

Biologists expect fish from the northern rivers to enter Lake Erie and those from the Scioto to reach the Ohio River, eventually returning to spawn as adults. Early signs from Maumee River releases since 2018 show rising sturgeon numbers in Lake Erie, encouraging expansion of the program. ODNR plans continued annual releases to establish self-sustaining sturgeon populations in both major watersheds.

## Governor Vetoes Youth Worker Legislation

Governor Mike DeWine vetoed [Senate Bill 50](#), which would have allowed those under 16 to be employed after 7pm during school year. It would have provided that with a parent or guardian's permission, those under 16 could work until 9pm.

In his veto message, DeWine emphasized:

- Working is valuable for youth development, but their schedules must also protect study time.
- Current law already allows 14- and 15-year-olds to work until 9 p.m. during summer or school breaks, and allows those 16 and older to work until 9 p.m. even on school nights.
- The bill's only substantive change would allow younger teens to work later during the school week, which he believes is unwise and unnecessary.
- He sees no compelling reason to alter long-standing child labor rules and argues the existing balance serves students well.

It is unclear if the legislature would act to overturn this veto.

## 2026 Lake Erie Protection Fund Grants Now Open

The [Ohio Lake Erie Commission](#) is accepting applications for the 2026 [Lake Erie Protection Fund](#). Grants support projects that protect and restore Lake Erie and its watershed, in line with the 2025 Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan, which includes:

- Reducing harmful algal blooms and controlling nutrient runoff
- Restoring and improving habitats and wetlands

- Promoting the beneficial reuse of dredge materials
- Advancing sustainable water quality and ecosystem health
- Funding Details

Grants of up to \$50,000 are available to eligible applicants including units of government, research institutions, and nonprofit organizations.

The application deadline is January 9, 2026, and the agency will announce awards in April 2026. For questions or assistance, contact Kris Patterson at [Kristina.Patterson@lakeerie.ohio.gov](mailto:Kristina.Patterson@lakeerie.ohio.gov).

## 2025 Lake Erie Walleye and Yellow Perch Hatch Results

- **Walleye:** The 2025 Lake Erie walleye hatch was the sixth largest in 38 years, well above the long-term average. The western basin recorded 128 young-of-year fish per hectare, and the central basin also exceeded historical averages, ranking fourth of 36 years. Walleye from this strong hatch are expected to reach legal size (15 inches) by spring 2027, supporting excellent fishing for years to come.
- **Yellow Perch:** The west zone yellow perch hatch ranked seventh largest in 38 years and was above average, indicating solid contributions to the catchable population beginning in 2027 and continued good fishing in the coming years. In contrast, the central and east zones experienced below-average hatches in 2025, partly due to limited survey conditions. Despite lower indices, anglers still reported good seasonal catches near some central basin harbors.
- **Management Implications:** These annual trawl surveys help predict future fish abundance and guide the Lake Erie Committee in setting safe harvest levels for both species.

Overall, Lake Erie's walleye population remains very strong, while yellow perch prospects are particularly favorable in the west zone, with more variability elsewhere. Governor DeWine and ODA Director Brian Baldrige praised Ohio farmers—especially in northwest Ohio—for their strong, ongoing commitment, calling the 2.5 million-acre benchmark “proof that farmers are invested in the health of our water and soil.”

## NMMA Policy Briefing

On December 11th the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) hosted a policy briefing webinar to review hot topics being discussed in states across the country. A large topic was PFASs, or forever chemicals. Many states are enacting and considering restrictions on PFASs. NMMA and impacted states are working to ensure regulations won't impede boating.

Many states are also looking at wake boarding restrictions like set-backs. These proposals often come with the support of environmental groups. However, overly restrictive policies will limit recreational boating opportunities. The webinar also discussed Invasive species, abandoned boats, boater education requirements (some states are increasing requirements), dredging, and boater access (including capital funding opportunities). It is beneficial to OMTA to hear topics being considered in other states.

## Marijuana Law Changes Sent to Governor

Senate Bill 56 makes changes to the recreational marijuana law passed by voters in 2023 as well as creating restriction for hemp sales. Regarding marijuana public use, SB 56 generally prohibits public smoking or vaping of marijuana and only allows the use on privately owned real property that is used primarily for

residential purposes. Regarding hemp, the bill generally bans products in line with language enacted by the federal government in the bill to end the government shutdown. The bill does treat hemp beverages differently and allows the sale of limited hemp beverages through the end of 2026. This week the Ohio Senate accepted the final version of the bill by a party line vote and has been sent to the Governor. DeWine has 10 days to act on the bill.

## News to Peruse

- [Cleveland waterfront proposals include mixed-use entertainment, soccer field, housing](#)
- [Cleveland Metroparks will run North Coast Harbor marina downtown](#)
- [Lake Erie plastic crisis: How did it jump from 16,000 to 700,000 particles despite conservation?](#)
- [Lake Erie shows water quality gains and thriving fishery despite algae challenges](#)
- [NOAA: Summer 2025 algal bloom was mild, within range](#)
- [Great Lakes microplastics: How they get there, how they spread, and why the picture remains murky](#)
- [Data centers could dispose of water in Ohio lakes if state EPA approves](#)
- [Vehicle registration, renewal fees to increase in 2026 as lifeline for state highway patrol](#)
- [Lake County seeks public input for Red Creek–Grand River watershed update](#)
- [Cleveland's waterfront organization nears selection for stadium-site developer\(s\)](#)
- [Early-season ice starting to appear on Lake Erie](#)