

Senate Hearing on Harmful Algal Blooms
Wednesday, May 21, 2025

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Good morning, Chair Harckham, members of the Committee on Environmental Conservation, and elected officials. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on New York State's efforts to combat harmful algal blooms, or HABs, in our natural environment.

On behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Markets, I can say with confidence that protecting New York's water supply is a top priority for our agency. We work every day alongside our colleagues at the Departments of Environmental Conservation and Health, the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, and our local partners at county Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) to accelerate watershed protection and restoration measures. These initiatives improve water quality, mitigate HABs, and build resilience to support New York's agricultural industry.

For example, Department programs like Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control, Climate Resilient Farming, and Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) prioritize projects that reduce nutrient runoff and soil erosion, which can contribute to HABs. Investments through these programs reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which is also critical to ensuring long-term water quality protections.

We are proud that, just over the last five years, New York has dedicated nearly \$125 million through these programs to on-farm projects that target these goals. Conserving our natural resources, fighting climate change, and protecting soil and water quality are all necessary to reducing the conditions that cause HABs.

Additionally, through various funding streams allocated in the Budget, the Department supports the SWCDs, which work with our farms to implement better nutrient and sediment control practices. The Department also supports the State's municipalities to increase stormwater absorption and improve water retention. These are accomplished through best management practices, such as nutrient management through manure storage, vegetative buffers along streams, conservation cover crops, water management, and more.

Since 2020, more than 6,500 farms across New York, working with our SWCDs, have received grants through the Department's environmental programs. Combined, the funded projects have reduced over 660,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions—the equivalent to removing more than 154,000 cars off the road for one year. They have also made a measurable impact towards keeping HABs out of the State's waterways.

Specific to the Finger Lakes Watershed area, \$66 million has been awarded over the last five years to implement best management practices on 370 farms within this region

of the state. The projects awarded in the Finger Lakes alone have reduced 32,800 pounds of total phosphorus, 746,000 pounds of total nitrogen, and 43 million pounds of sediment per year.¹ This work has reduced New York State's agricultural emissions by nearly 43,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent every year.²

We are proud of this positive impact, even as we know that more must be done to address HABs in watersheds, including in the Finger Lakes. As such, we are developing comprehensive action plans that will not only build on our current work to prevent water pollution, improve nutrient management, and reduce erosion, but will also guide our future goals for a sustainable environment and cleaner waterbodies.

Most recently, New York State announced \$1.2 million in funding for the Eastern Finger Lakes Coalition. The Coalition covers 11 Conservation Districts and more than 30 percent of the Lake Ontario drainage basin, including seven of New York's Finger Lakes – Canandaigua, Keuka, Seneca, Cayuga, Owasco, Skaneateles, and Otisco – and their watersheds. The region recently reported a greater frequency of HABs. This investment in the Coalition helps it to build professional capacity, coordinate efforts, and accelerate agricultural and resiliency-related projects, including dedicated funding to address HABs. It also includes support for farmers to invest in more cover crops, improve culverts to reduce runoff, enhance soil health, and reduce water quality impairments in the region.

An additional \$42 million, supported by the Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act and other capital resources, is being directed to make further water quality improvements and combat HABs in the region as well. This will help the State build on its current programs and support the Coalition with innovative agricultural and resilience projects both on and off farms. Projects like these have been identified in federal and State approved clean water plans and other pollution prevention plans. These are intended to further drive down nutrient and sediment runoff in the Eastern Finger Lakes watersheds.

While these are significant measures aimed at improving our water quality and reducing instances of HABs, there is no question that much more needs to be done to reduce the frequency and duration of HABs in our waterbodies. We want to assure you that, on the State level, we are taking action, alongside our local partners, and will continue to do all we can to preserve these most precious resources, now and for our future generations.

¹ [Pollutant Load Reduction Calculator Instructions](#) (PDF) and corresponding [Pollutant Load Reduction Calculator Spreadsheet](#) (Excel)

² <https://www.comet-planner.com>