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Lake Erie's guardians

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Disputes are brewing over Ohio's new permit system to govern water withdrawals from Lake Erie under the Great Lakes regional compact.

A new advisory committee will define "adverse impact" to Lake Erie and its tributaries. State lawmakers will make nominations to the panel to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

Ohio DNR Deputy Director Karl Gebhardt said his department expects controversy over the appointments, as it attempts to balance environmental needs against the demands of manufacturers, agribusiness, and other major industries.

Linda Woggon, executive vice president of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, said the business community will insist on "certainty, clarity, and predictability" from the advisory board.

Ohio lawmakers took longer than those in any other state in the Great Lakes region to enact a law that sets guidelines for industrial water-withdrawal permits, to uphold the state's obligations under the Great Lakes compact. Gov. John Kasich signed the bill last summer, despite concerns about whether it affords Lake Erie and its tributaries enough protection.

The governor must ensure fair and balanced representation on the influential advisory committee. And lawmakers need to keep thinking hard about the best way to manage Lake Erie, Ohio's greatest water asset.

Each state must deliver its plans next year to a compact council. Our state's product needs to make Ohioans proud.