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Written Testimony by Patrick Neu
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On “Harmful Algal Blooms: The Impact on our Nation’s Waters,”
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Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Senator Baldwin, Senator Johnson and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on “Harmful Algal Blooms and The Impact on our Nation’s Waters.”

As a lifelong Wisconsin resident and now a part time SW Florida resident I have been exposed to algae blooms my entire life. With a passion for angling that began very early in my life, I spent countless hours on the Madison chain of lakes while growing up in Madison, Wisconsin in the 60’s and 70’s. During those years I had first had experience with the effects algae blooms had on those lakes.

Now 50 years later after having made my living in the outdoor industry and having been recently inducted into the National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame, I am more passionate than ever for the outdoors and for sportfishing. I am currently serving as Executive Director of the National Professional Anglers Association (NPAA), a 1200 member association comprised of anglers who have taken the step from “Passion to Profession.” I am also president of the Future Angler Foundation (FAF) a non-profit organization that I helped create in 2012 to support volunteerism among anglers who are willing to share their passion and knowledge about angling through education and outreach to help grow the sport they love.

Angling and the outdoors have dominated my life and I believe that the nearly 49 million anglers in this country share my concerns surrounding the future of our sport. I am here today to help convey to you the importance that clean waters and healthy aquatic ecosystems play in the utilization of the plentiful aquatic resources we have in this country by anglers, boaters, and others who share my passion for the outdoors.

First Hand Knowledge

This hearing on harmful algal blooms is timely considering the awareness that has been brought to these blooms this year across the country. Algae blooms have occurred naturally for centuries, however, through nutrient loading of our waters, humans have caused these blooms to intensify to a level where they are now negatively affecting utilization of our public waters. Warmer than normal temperatures this year and record rainfall in many areas have contributed to some of the worst algal blooms we have experienced in years, including the blooms that have occurred in Florida that have helped to feed the deadly “Red Tide” and blue-green algae outbreaks.

I am not a scientist and I am not here to testify as such. I will leave explanation of the causes of these algal blooms to those who are the experts on them, but I do understand that these harmful outbreaks are related to increased nutrients in the aquatic ecosystem. That said, I fear that these blooms are having a negative effect on the utilization of the resource by anglers, boaters, and others who utilize our public waters.

I have seen it firsthand this year as my wife and I fished a tournament event on Lake Winnebago, a large basin lake in central Wisconsin, where during the first week of July an algae bloom on the lake was so bad that it forced us and other anglers to search out areas of the lake where the algae wasn’t present in order to fish effectively. Even more concerning we did such so as not to have the fumes emanating from the algae mats negatively affect our respiratory system. The experience we had on Lake Winnebago that week prompted us to cancel our plans to fish the lake again in early August for the championship event for the tournament series. This tournament series lost not only our entry, but also approximately 35 other teams out of the 90 teams that qualified to fish the event.

In preparing to testify today I also reached out to numerous friends and NPAA members to get their input on the severity of the algae blooms this year. The prevailing answer was this has been the worst year they have seen in years for algae blooms. Additional research found articles about the algal bloom issues this year. The images attached to the end of this testimony are an example of what the communities in Wisconsin are dealing with when an algae bloom occurs.

What are the Consequences?

Harmful algal blooms, whether in Wisconsin, Florida, or many other parts of the country that are experiencing this phenomenon, have consequences to the communities surrounding the bodies of water where the blooms occur.

From an angler's perspective, algae blooms affect the way anglers fish and where they chose to fish. This becomes evident when you talk to anglers about targeting fish during these blooms. The blooms are not always detrimental to anglers or the fishing, in fact sometimes they help us target certain species that position themselves to feed on the minnows and other small fish that feed on the invertebrates that feed on the algae. But, given the choice anglers would definitely prefer not to deal with the smell, buildup of algae on their lines and boats, or the bug hatches that occur around the mats of this floating algae mess.

Algal blooms are of such concern to anglers that In-Fisherman, one of the leading publications on angling "how to" and angling knowledge, has written articles on how to catch fish during these blooms (<http://www.in-fisherman.com/walleye/walleye-fishing-during-algae-blooms/>) and have written articles about the concerns they have for the future of the resource as a result of these blooms (<http://www.in-fisherman.com/midwest-finesse/algae-bloom-woes-and-more/>).

Boaters and swimmers have learned to avoid the lakes during these blooms. In some cases swimming or participating in water sports like water skiing in these waters can be hazardous to your health and that of your pets if they are exposed. Signs are often posted at boat landings warning of the health issues that can occur during these blooms.

From an economic standpoint, communities affected by algal blooms are at risk of losing significant revenue when local residents and tourists choose not to utilize the waters for recreation. Hotels, motels, restaurants, fishing guides, sport/bait shops, marine dealers, and marina's all experience a loss of business during these algal bloom outbreaks.

This loss of resource utilization revenue occurs in all states and this year it has been in the news frequently with the outbreak of "Red Tide" on Florida's Southwest coastline, as well as the disastrous blue-green algae outbreaks that result from Lake Okeechobee discharges into the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers. In the short-term, these outbreaks have caused significant losses in tourism, especially those related to cancelled recreational fishing trips, as well as massive fish kills. The long-term impacts of this year's algal bloom outbreak are yet to be seen, but common sense dictates it will affect tourism in the state in the coming months and beyond. Fishing guides in the affected area will certainly lose business due to the extensive media coverage of the fish kills that have occurred during this recent outbreak.

To my knowledge there hasn't been a study done on what the total economic impact is as a result of these algal blooms in the U.S. Sportfishing alone adds \$125 billion dollars to our economy each year on a national basis. [MLI]The potential loss to our economy due to harmful algal blooms is likely a staggering number.

Conclusion

As I have testified, algae blooms are not new to our public waters. They have occurred naturally for centuries, but urban sprawl, commercial farming, and our changing climate are causing these outbreaks to be more severe. Programs like the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and those directed under the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act are critical federal programs that advance the scientific understanding and ability to detect, monitor, assess, and predict harmful algal blooms. I applaud the Senate for passing S.1057 – the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Amendments Act of 2017 – and hope the House will quickly pass similar legislation before the current authorization expires so that the very important work conducted under this program can continue.

The United States has vast aquatic resources that we need to protect for future generations of anglers, boaters and outdoor recreational users. I have spent a considerable amount of my time, both personally and professionally, in trying to bring new anglers, especially youth, into the sport of fishing so that they can develop the same lifelong appreciation for our aquatic resources and dedication to preserving them. Our outdoor culture in this country increases our quality of life and helps makes our country unique.

It's an honor to have been asked to testify on behalf of those who cherish our public waters as much as I do. Thank you for the opportunity.

Attached Images Below



Photo Courtesy of U.W. Sea Grant-Lake Winnebago in Neenah, WI



Photo Courtesy of U.W. Sea Grant-Lake Mendota & Monona in Madison, WI



Photo Courtesy of the Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune