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Kasich trumpets Lake Erie's vast wealth

Governor signs directive banning gas or oil drilling

By MATT MARKEY

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PORT CLINTON -- Gov. John Kasich used the occasion of the 34th annual Fish Ohio Day to spend some time here fishing on Lake Erie, and then signed an executive order prohibiting drilling for oil or gas, both on or under the lake.

The order is similar to one signed by fellow Republican Gov. Bob Taft in 2003 that had expired early in 2007. The document signed Wednesday by Kasich protects the lake from drilling, should a federal ban on that activity ever be removed.

Kasich's move was applauded by environmental groups and the charter fishermen who make their living fishing on Lake Erie.

"He understands the importance of this lake," said Rick Unger, president of the Lake Erie Charter Boat Association. "The governor promised to look out for the lake, and he has kept his word. When we've brought an issue to his attention, he's acted on it. He's always willing to work on this lake."

Kasich voiced a commitment to bring all involved parties together to preserve and protect Lake Erie as Ohio's most precious natural resource.

"We're not going to take no for an answer," Kasich said about efforts to reduce the algae blooms sparked by agricultural runoff that have choked Lake Erie, and to keep up the fight to prevent additional invasive species from being established in the Great Lakes. "We've got to make sure this lake is healthy."

Kasich said Lake Erie is threatened by issues similar to those that recently reached the crisis point in Grand Lake St. Marys, where runoff from farms was a significant factor in toxic algae blooms. Programs to reduce agricultural runoff have helped improve conditions on Grand Lake St. Marys, Ohio's largest inland lake that sits between Celina and St. Marys, and Kasich said he thinks similar efforts will work on Lake Erie.

"It's a bigger problem ... it's bigger scale ... but we're committed to it. And I think we're making some progress," he said.

"I'm very well aware of these algae blooms [on Lake Erie] and I know we've got to fight it, and there's multiple ways to do it. We're aware of it and we're pushing it, and we're getting the word out there."

Kasich said taking an active role in the management and protection of the lake is a huge responsibility that he considers one of his most vital roles as governor.

"I get a chance to be the steward, and that day will come and go, as well, but while I'm here, the lake is precious," he said. "We can't mess around with this. The Lord gave us these beautiful resources, and we can't afford to let them be diminished on our watch."

Kasich, who fished with former Ohio Gov. and former U.S. Sen. George Voinovich on Wednesday, said the outing on Lake Erie was productive on several levels.

"Not only were we able to catch some fish, and not only was I able to catch some fish, but we may have caught a company," Kasich said.

The governor said that while he was out on the lake he took a call from officials of a company that was visiting Columbus and considering bringing business to the state.

"I told them how wonderful Ohio is, [about] our resources, we're a positive state, [and] we have a lot of good people," he said.

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