



Healthy Waters Coalition Update

March 2013

The Healthy Waters Coalition is a diverse group of municipal and state water and wastewater organizations, and conservation and sustainable agriculture organizations working in Washington DC and in communities throughout the country. The Coalition is focused on strengthening links between our working agricultural lands and the quality of our Nation's waters with a specific focus on nutrients. If you do not wish to receive these updates, we can remove you from our lists.

Below is an overview of the related press coverage during the month of March.

Studies and Research

[EPA Survey Finds More Than Half of the Nation's River and Stream Miles in Poor Condition](#)

EPA News Release

Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released the results of the first comprehensive survey looking at the health of thousands of stream and river miles across the country, finding that more than half – 55 percent – are in poor condition for aquatic life. “The health of our Nation’s rivers, lakes, bays and coastal waters depends on the vast network of streams where they begin, and this new science shows that America’s streams and rivers are under significant pressure,” said Office of Water Acting Assistant Administrator Nancy Stoner. “The 2008-2009 National Rivers and Stream Assessment reflects the most recent data available, and is part of EPA’s expanded effort to monitor waterways in the U.S. and gather scientific data on the condition of the Nation’s water resources. Read the Survey [Here](#). Also covered in: [Science World Report](#); [Pew Stateline](#); [Bloomberg](#); [Environment News Service](#); [Mother Nature Network](#); [Washington Post](#)

[Nutrient Management in Agriculture Loaded with Potential](#)

AgriNews

Purdue University scientists are working with their counterparts at the University of Notre Dame to address nutrient management challenges facing agriculture. They recently visited Indianapolis to discuss new technologies for managing nutrient runoff as well as research on how to better communicate with the farming community about new techniques. “In Indiana, more than 90 percent of 50,000 kilometers of stream and ditch are located within 500 meters of a row crop field,” said Jennifer Tank, Galla Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Notre Dame. “Our land that we use in the Midwest contributes to problems in Mexico and the Great Lakes, with the Gulf of Mexico and Lake Erie experiencing periods of hypoxia and a dead zone.” The University of Notre Dame secured a grant from the Nature Conservancy that allowed for the installment of a two-stage ditch with native grass seed from another area.

[University to Study Farm Runoff System](#)

The Kent County News

Maryland Industrial Partnerships has awarded a grant in the amount of \$90,000 to Sam Owings' High Impact Environmental system for storm water management. The granting body is affiliated with the University of Maryland Technology Enterprise Institute. Allen Davis, of the University of Maryland Civil and Environmental Engineering Department, will be the lead investigator in a yearlong study of the HIE system's effect on stormwater runoff. Owings' agricultural stormwater cascading system, which he installed on his farm on Church Hill Road, consists of four shallow ponds that collect stormwater and flow from one pond to the next, depositing silt and nutrients on their way to the river. In addition to cleaning and filtering the runoff, the system creates topsoil as a byproduct, and enhances wildlife habitats on the property.

[Nutrients, Technology Key Players in Future of Food Production](#)

Farm Futures

The ongoing discussion about future food and fuel needs has reached a fever pitch in recent years as frequently cited United Nations data estimates nine billion people will call Earth home by 2050. The challenge of feeding a growing population – and tackling meat and food demands of a growing middle class – is a task agricultural researchers have been pondering for some time. It's also a topic the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology in Ames, Iowa, has examined in a new issue paper, "[Food Fuel and Plant Nutrient Use in the Future](#)," released Monday. There are a variety of factors that will play into the future of agriculture, with the most vital being food production ability and capacity, nutrient conservation and management, and biofuels' impact on feedstuff availability. Research commonly finds that each will be intertwined, creating a web of agricultural issues for the future.

[Lake Erie Nutrient Management Priorities Set at International Workshop](#)

National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science

Don Scavia, a researcher whose work is funded in part by the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, presented results from his [Lake Erie hypoxia ecological forecasting](#) project. His presentation focused on phosphorus loading, climate influence on those loads, subsequent impacts on dissolved oxygen and harmful algal blooms, and best management practices to control nutrient runoff. Despite decades of nutrient pollution runoff reductions, harmful algal blooms and hypoxia (deadly zones of insufficient oxygen) have intensified in Lake Erie, the southernmost and shallowest of the Great Lakes. Dr. Scavia, from the University of Michigan, gave his presentation at the Lake Erie Ecosystem Priority Science Synthesis Workshop, sponsored by the Great Lakes International Joint Commission, and held from February 25-26, 2013 in Windsor, Ontario.

State Activities

[Louisiana Looking at Nutrient Management Plan for Dead Zone](#)

Sun Herald

Four Louisiana agencies are gathering information on nutrients in watersheds across the state with an eye toward reducing their impact on the Gulf of Mexico and "dead zones." The "dead zone" is an area of low oxygen that develops every spring and summer. The dead zone forms because fertilizer and other nutrients run into the Mississippi River, which empties into the Gulf. The nutrients feed huge numbers of microscopic organisms. When they die, their decomposition uses up oxygen. It is a recurring problem affecting sea life off the Louisiana coast, and sometimes the coasts of Mississippi and Texas. The Louisiana State Nutrient Team is made up of representatives from the state's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, Department of Agriculture and

Forestry, Department of Environmental Quality, and Department of Natural Resources. Also Covered in: [The Advocate](#), [The Advertiser](#)

[Bill Would Give Farmers 10-Year Reprieve on New Regs](#)

The Baltimore Sun

A bill moving through the General Assembly would give Maryland farmers a 10-year reprieve from new state or local environmental regulations if the state Department of Agriculture deems they're doing their part to clean up the Chesapeake Bay. To get the deal, farmers would first have to reduce pollution from their land more quickly than is now required – an important point, supporters say, since farm runoff is the largest contributor to the bay's water quality woes. The proposal has the backing of farmers, Gov. Martin O'Malley and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the region's largest environmental group. But critics — including nearly two dozen other environmental and civic groups — say it's a bad idea, given lingering uncertainty about the effectiveness of current farm pollution regulations.

[Activists say Farm Bill Causes Oversight Loopholes](#)

Associated Press/WCF Courier

As Iowa officials near an agreement with federal authorities who are seeking tougher inspections of the state's livestock operations to prevent water pollution, activists are protesting a proposal they argue would make it easier for some farmers to avoid oversight. Legislation proposed in the House and Senate would allow some livestock producers to close down barns and be reclassified as small operations. Members of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement protested Tuesday in the state Capitol. They argue that the measures will allow farmers to store manure in those idled barns, which could lead to water-polluting spills either when the waste is transported or while it sits in an unsupervised facility.

[EPA Cuts Deal with Florida on Pollution Rules, Delighting Business and Angering Environmentalists](#)

Tampa Bay Times

If Florida legislators and regulators will take certain steps, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says it will back off imposing new water pollution regulations on the state's waterways. State Department of Environmental Protection officials announced Friday that they have cut a deal with EPA officials to let the state take the lead in regulating nitrogen and phosphorus pollution, known together as nutrients. "We can now move forward to implementing nutrient reduction criteria, rather than delaying environmental improvements due to endless litigation," DEP Secretary Herschel Vinyard Jr. said in a news release. Also covered in: [Florida Center for Investigative Reporting](#)

[Regulation Requires Farmers' Nitrogen Fertilizer Details](#)

Western Farm Press

Nitrogen fertilizer has undoubtedly benefited California's agriculture and citizens. However, applying more nitrogen than can be used by plants may lead to negative impacts on the environment and human health. Finding a balanced use of nitrogen to maximize benefit and minimize harm is essential to protect California's agriculture, people and natural resources. As California legislators focus on nitrogen use in agriculture and its ability to contaminate groundwater, potential regulation on fertilizer use will require solid information on the amount of fertilizer used by California farmers, and the extent to which that usage contributes to environmental pollution. A new study published in *California Agriculture* evaluates trends in fertilizer use by California's major crops. It also shows that major deficiencies in data collection need to be addressed in order to develop effective policies regarding fertilizer use.

Local Activities

[Wash. Dairies to Reduce Runoff Pollution](#)

Food Manufacturing

A group of Yakima Valley dairies have agreed to reduce runoff pollution that's tainting the area's groundwater, officials announced Wednesday. The agreement between the dairies and the Environmental Protection Agency comes more than five months after the agency published a study that said the dairies were likely to be one of the sources of nitrate pollution in nearby private water wells. The study was followed up by lawsuit threats from public interests groups. "These are family farmers who have lived and worked in this community for decades," said Paul Queary, a spokesman for the dairies, in a statement. "They are committed to responsible business practices and working with the EPA to protect the health and safety of their neighbors."

[Nutrient Reduction 101 Reaches Kossuth](#)

The Messenger

Iowa State University brought its basic nutrient reduction strategy team to Wesley on March 14 to outline for about 55 farmers what they can do to help Iowa meet its goal of reducing, by 45 percent, its nutrient pollution of surface waters in the Upper Mississippi River Valley. ISU department of economics associate dean John Lawrence and ag engineer Matt Helmers said the nutrient management strategy is in its early stages of development, but that early efforts were to implement existing soil conservation practices. These include keeping nitrogen and phosphorus from leaching and eroding from farm fields, reduced tillage, cover crops and buffer zones.