Healthy Waters Coalition Update
April 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 April.

Studies and Research

Report says Harmful Algae Blooms on Lake Erie will Become worse unless action taken
The Plain Dealer
Increased heavy rains combining with agricultural runoff are leading to record-breaking algae blooms on Lake Erie, and it's only going to get worse unless changes are made, according to a National Wildlife Federation report released today .And if voluntary changes are not effective, it might mean farmers will face new state and federal regulations. "Most nutrient managers and farmers see the writing on the wall," said Melinda Koslow, regional program manager at Great Lakes office of the National Wildlife Federation in Ann Arbor, Mich., and a co-author of the study. "(Regulation) might not be a bad thing because, obviously, we need to do something about this problem." Farmers realize there is a problem with runoff from fields, said Les Ober of the Ohio State University Extension in Burton. He said the process of educating farmers on how to combat it will take time. Also Covered in: *WBFO NPR*, *Public News Service*, *National Geographic*, *The News-Herald*, *Columbus Dispatch*

Report: Fewer Pollutants Entering Chesapeake Bay
Daily Press
The amount of pollutants flowing into the Chesapeake Bay has decreased for the third year running, according to newly released estimates by the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP), a regional federal-state partnership formed to help restore the bay. The CBP announced Tuesday that data on pollution-reduction efforts reported by Virginia and other watershed states indicate they've achieved up to a third of the reductions they must meet by 2025: 25 percent of nitrogen, 27 percent of phosphorus and 32 percent of sediment. CBP Director Nick DiPasquale noted the bay's ecosystem remains "precarious," but praised the overall reduction efforts. While we clearly have a lot of work to do, we are making progress in meeting water quality goals," DiPasquale said in a prepared statement.

Federal Activities

Senate to Take Up Farm Bill in May

The Hill

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) announced Thursday that the Senate will take up a five-year farm bill in May. The upper chamber passed a full farm bill last year on a 64-35 vote, but one was not enacted before the 2008 farm bill expired in September. The House Agriculture Committee marked up a bill, but GOP leaders prevented it from coming to the floor. The Senate Agriculture Committee has not announced an exact date for a markup of the bill. This time around, Chairman Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) will be working with a new ranking member Sen. Thad Cochran (R-Miss.), who is sure to seek a stronger safety net for southern growers of rice and peanuts. Also Covered In: *Harvest Public Media*, *AgWeek*, *Agri-Pulse*

EPA Issues Nonpoint Source Guidance Giving States Monitoring Flexibility

Bloomberg BNA

Under final guidance for state nonpoint source programs released April 12, the Environmental Protection Agency will not require states to use limited nonpoint source program grants to monitor the quality of all waters that have been identified for priority attention by the Agriculture Department because of nutrient runoff. That is a change from the draft version of the guidelines issued in November 2012 in which EPA stated its intention to require use of those funds for monitoring all priority waters. In the final Nonpoint Source Program and Grant Guidelines for States and Territories, EPA allows states more flexibility. States will still have to monitor in at least one watershed to be selected from among the priority areas identified by USDA in its National Water Quality Initiative

State Activities

Senate Approves Water Pollution Bill

Miami Herald

The Florida Senate has passed a bill authorizing the state's Department of Environmental Protection to start enforcing rules to reduce water pollution. The bill (SB 1808) passed 34-4 on Wednesday. State and federal environmental authorities agreed last month on "numeric nutrient criteria" - how much fertilizer and other pollutants should be allowed in Florida waters. The idea is to let Florida eventually enforce water pollution rules without the federal government's intervention. Environmental groups have complained the rules aren't strict enough. Fertilizer and animal manure from farms and ranches run into waterways and carry nitrogen and phosphorus.

Kentucky Will Develop New Strategy to Reduce Nutrient Pollution

WFPL Louisville

Kentucky regulators say the state will develop a more comprehensive strategy for controlling nutrient water pollution, which commonly comes from sources like sewage treatment plants and agricultural runoff. Regulators from a dozen states and five federal agencies met in Louisville today to discuss the pollution, and how it contributes to hypoxia. Hypoxia means there’s a lack of oxygen. In oceans, it’s caused by an abundance of nutrient pollution, and can result in the creation of ‘dead zones’ that can’t sustain life. The most notorious Dead Zone is in the Gulf of Mexico, and all of the states that drain into the Mississippi River—including Kentucky—contribute to the problem. Also covered in: *Courier-Journal*

Universities Seek Grant to Run Nutrient Management Center

Des Moines Register

University researchers are seeking a federal grant to create a nutrient management center to help fight farm runoff linked to the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. The Center for Nutrient Management would be run by Iowa State University, the University of Iowa and the University of Illinois, Larry Weber of the Iowa Flood Center told members of a state water resources panel Wednesday. The center would be led by ISU economist Catherine Kling, who would serve as principal investigator. The $2.5 million application could be in addition to millions that Iowa lawmakers are debating for similar work, which is aimed at easing the disruption of Gulf fisheries when fertilizer runoff feeds algae blooms. When the algae die, oxygen is consumed, leaving a large area lifeless in summer.

Nebraska Rivers Threatened by Degradation, Pollution

Daily Nebraskan

Nebraska rivers are just as degraded than the rest of the nation, according to a new nationwide study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA reports that 55 percent of U.S. rivers are in poor conditions, 23 percent are in fair condition and 21 percent are in good condition. In Nebraska, 58 percent were in poor biological health, 26 percent were in fair conditions and 16 were in good condition when the EPA sampled rivers in 2009.The biggest problem, according to the study, is high levels of nutrient pollution caused by nitrogen and phosphorus washing in the river from farms, cities and sewers.Even though the study focused on surface water, more than 95 percent of water in Lincoln is from ground water, according to Dave Gosselin, a professor of Earth science in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Natural Resources.

Local Activities

Hernando Looks at Fertilizer Limits to Clean up Weeki Wachee Spring System

Tampa Bay Times

Swimming across a page of the May issue of National Geographic is a Weeki Wachee mermaid in a bright pink swimsuit. Great public relations for Hernando County's premier attraction, right? Wrong. It's an illustration for a story about how the over-use of nitrogen fertilizers are degrading the environment across the globe. "When the mermaid show at Weeki Wachee Springs in Florida made its debut in 1947, the bathing beauties swam among waving fronds of eelgrass,'' reads the caption. "Today algae fed by nitrogen fertilizer from farms and lawns crowd out many of the springs' native plants.'' Next week, the County Commission will get a chance to talk about what it can do to halt the decline of their signature spring system.

Keeping Crop Nutrients in the Field & on the Job

Public News Service

The Boone River watershed has lost more than $630,000 worth of fertilizer in the past 20 days, in the form of nitrate leaching into the Des Moines River. Much of it eventually winds up in the Gulf of Mexico. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates 630 tons have washed into the river since April 4 - up to $4,200 lost every hour. Keeping nitrogen where it can do its work has long baffled farmers, but Tim Smith, who farms near Eagle Grove in the Boone River watershed, thinks he has the answer. "Some experiences that I've come across in the last year from my nitrate monitoring, I've been able to reduce the nitrate levels that are leaving my farm by using cover crops and by using side dressing on my fields," Smith said.

Manure Runoff Threatens Southern Minnesota Streams, Fish

Twin Cities Pioneer Press

Manure-laden sediment has been running off farm fields and into trout streams for more than a week in southern Minnesota. At least one fish kill has been reported, and several cases of manure runoff are being investigated. And state officials are warning that regulations might not be enough to protect the unique ecology here from being damaged amid the quirks of a late-spring thaw. Some farmers, often with no more room to store a winter's worth of manure, have been spreading it or applying it in liquid form on ice- or snow-covered fields, a practice discouraged by state regulators but not illegal. When manure enters a stream, the decomposition process starves the stream of oxygen needed by fish and invertebrates.

TROUBLED WATERS: Susquehanna River fighting for its life

Williamsport Sun-Gazette

The Susquehanna River has some problems, and concerned people including environmentalists and anglers would love to have it listed as impaired. That designation would make it eligible for federal research money under the Clean Water Act. A Susquehanna Summit held recently in Lewisburg brought together a number of advocates for the river, the principal tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. They talked about the pollution problems from agricultural runoff and sewage disposal. And, they expressed concerns about the dwindling smallmouth bass population of recent years. In fact, what was once considered a world-class fishery for bass is being seriously threatened. "We need to show that the river is not remaining a warmwater fishery," said Guy Alsentzer, a Lower Susquehanna riverkeeper.

Once Too Polluted, Lansing's Red Cedar River is Once Again Open to Anglers

Michigan Public Radio

For the first time in nearly a half century, people will be encouraged to fish along a portion of the Red Cedar River as it winds its way through the Michigan State University campus in East Lansing. At a ceremony Monday near the campus's western edge, MSU dignitaries, including Sparty, took turns dumping buckets of Steelhead trout into the meandering Red Cedar River. Organizers want anglers to start casting their lines into the Red Ceder in hopes of reeling in the sportfish. That's a big change. "In the past, it suffered water quality issues, primarily agricultural drainage. It suffered a lot from non-source point runoff," says Hanshue. "Since the enactment of the Clean Water Act, the river's cleaned dramatically. It supports a diverse fishery now."

Veil of the Valley: A Soiled Past, A Natural Future

Times Online

Switching to composted fertilizer made sense for Wayne Harley and his son, Aaron Harley. Since they made the change three years ago, they've improved the quality of the soil at their Oak Spring Farm and enjoyed better yields. The compost heap sitting on their 52-acre property consists of leaves they collected from New Brighton and Daugherty Township, lime pellets and bags of coffee grounds recycled from Hallowed Grounds Coffee Roasterie in New Brighton. Through this sustainable process, the farmers were able to decrease their use of chemical fertilizer spray by 50 percent. Last year, the Harleys spent about $1,200 on fertilizer, a savings of about half over the days before they started using natural fertilizers. The savings are compounded as the cost of traditional fertilizers has more than doubled over the last five years.

Litigation Activities

Court refuses to dismiss poultry farmer's suit against EPA

BC Democrat

Poultry and livestock farmers scored a win Monday when a federal court rejected efforts by the Environmental Protection Agency to dismiss a case brought by West Virginia poultry farmer Lois Alt, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation. Alt had challenged an EPA order demanding that she obtain a Clean Water Act discharge permit for ordinary stormwater runoff from her farmyard. Despite EPA's recent withdrawal of the Alt order, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of West Virginia ruled that the case should go forward to clarify for the benefit of Alt and other farmers whether, as EPA contends, discharge permits are required for "ordinary precipitation runoff from a typical farmyard." Also Covered in: *Delmarva Now/Associated Press*

Miscellaneous

Fertilized World: If we don't watch out, agriculture could destroy our planet.

National Geographic

N. Nitrogen. Atomic number seven. Unnoticed, untasted, it nevertheless fills our stomachs. It is the engine of agriculture, the key to plenty in our crowded, hungry world. Without this independent-minded element, disinclined to associate with other gases, the machinery of photosynthesis cannot function—no protein can form, and no plant can grow. Corn, wheat, and rice, the fast-growing crops on which humanity depends for survival, are among the most nitrogen hungry of all plants. Giant factories capture inert nitrogen gas from the vast stores in our atmosphere and force it into a chemical union with the hydrogen in natural gas, creating the reactive compounds that plants crave. That nitrogen fertilizer—more than a hundred million tons applied worldwide every year—fuels bountiful harvests. Without it, human civilization in its current form could not exist.

Conservation Community's Principles and Recommendations for Strengthening the Farm Bill Conservation Title

A number of conservation organizations signed on to a statement in support of policy reforms within the Farm Bill to strengthen conservation programs administered by the USDA. The statement reads in part that the Conservation Title programs, funding and authorities have never been more important than they are today as we re-start serious deliberations about reauthorization of the farm bill. The voluntary conservation programs and conservation compliance provisions established in the farm bill have delivered great benefits to farmers and ecological integrity over the last 25 years. These benefits include increased farmland sustainability, a dramatic reduction of soil erosion of more than 40 percent, a dramatic decrease in net wetlands loss on farmland, the preservation and enhancement of critical habitat for endangered species, and substantial financial return for farmers and landowners. These gains have been hard-fought, but there is still a lot of work to do.