



Healthy Waters Coalition Update

June 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 June.

Farm Bill

[House Rejects Farm Bill as Food Stamp Cuts Prove Divisive](#)

New York Times

The surprise defeat of the farm bill in the House on Thursday underscored the ideological divide between the more conservative, anti-spending Republican lawmakers and their leadership, who failed to garner sufficient votes from their caucus as well as from Democrats. The vote against the bill, 234 to 195, comes a year after House leaders pulled the measure off the calendar because conservative lawmakers demanded deeper cuts in the food stamp program and Democrats objected. This year's measure called for more significant cuts than the Senate bill, but it still did not go far enough to get a majority in the House to support an overhaul of the nation's food and farm programs. Sixty-two Republicans, or more than a quarter of the caucus, voted with Democrats to defeat the bill.

Studies and Research

[Biggest Dead Zone Ever Forecast in Gulf of Mexico](#)

National Geographic

A possibly record-breaking, New Jersey-size dead zone may put a chokehold on the Gulf of Mexico (map) this summer, according to a forecast released this week. Unusually robust spring floods in the U.S. Midwest are flushing agricultural runoff—namely, nitrogen and phosphorus—into the Gulf and spurring giant algal blooms, which lead to dead zones, or areas devoid of oxygen that occur in the summer. The forecast, developed by the University of Michigan and Louisiana State University with support from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, estimates a Gulf dead zone of between 7,286 and 8,561 square miles (18,870 and 22,172 square kilometers). The largest ever reported in the Gulf, 8,481 square miles (21,965 square kilometers), occurred in 2002. Also Covered in: [International Business Times](#); [The Advocate](#); [USA Today](#); [Environmental News Network](#); [Grist](#); [Science World Report](#); [FOX News](#);

[The Difficult Problem of Nonpoint Nutrient Pollution: Could the Endangered Species Act Offer Some Relief?](#)

William & Mary Environmental Law and Policy Review

Nutrient pollution of rivers, streams, lakes, and estuaries is one of the preeminent water quality issues in the United States today, and poses a significant threat to the health of aquatic ecosystems. Agricultural nonpoint discharges, the runoff of nitrogen and phosphorous from animal manure and chemical fertilizers, are the primary sources of such

nutrient pollution. A pervasive and long-standing problem, nonpoint pollution, nutrient and otherwise, has proven to be one of the toughest challenges in contemporary environmental regulation. This situation is significantly attributable to the political and administrative dynamics of fragmented regulatory authority. The power to control such nonpoint discharges remains largely beyond the reach of federal Clean Water Act authority, and rests with the states, who have proven to be reluctant regulators.

[Nitrogen Pollution is Widespread in Southern Minnesota Lakes and Rivers, Report Finds](#)

Minneapolis Star Tribune

Nitrogen contamination in southern Minnesota is so severe that 27 percent of the region's lakes and rivers could not be used for drinking water, according to an unexpectedly blunt assessment of state water pollution released Wednesday. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA) said that, overall, 41 percent of the streams and lakes in southern Minnesota have excessive nitrogen, which can be toxic to fish and other forms of aquatic life and is the state's most widespread form of water pollution. Nitrogen is one of the nutrients that sweeps down the Mississippi River from the Upper Midwest and into the Gulf of Mexico, where it creates a polluted area known as the "dead zone" which now covers an area as big as Massachusetts. Also covered in: [Pioneer Press](#); [Twin Cities Daily Planet](#); [Minnesota Public Radio](#); [CBS Minnesota](#)

[Study Targets Farming Runoff](#)

Bucyrus Telegraph Forum

A donation of \$2,000 toward a water quality research project is just the beginning of a study that could prevent algae blooms in the Lake Erie Basin. The Crawford County Farm Bureau made the donation toward the project that is being conducted by The Ohio State University, Ohio State University Extension Office and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agriculture Research Service. "We're not testing water in the creeks and rivers," said Steve Reinhard, a trustee with the Farm Bureau and a Crawford County commissioner. "We are actually testing the water as it runs out of agricultural fields." Reinhard said the \$3 million project will be implemented over three years and is being supported by the Ohio Soybean Council, the Ohio Corn Marketing program and the Ohio Small Grains Marketing program, among others.

State Activities

[State Seeks Runoff Rules to Curb Algae](#)

The Columbus Dispatch

Eager to stem the spread of toxic algae in Lake Erie and inland lakes, Ohio officials are seeking new powers to curb pollution from farms. A plan circulated among state agencies, lawmakers, farming lobbyists and environmental advocates would give the Department of Natural Resources the authority to cite farmers for pollution if rain washes too much fertilizer off their fields. Farmers also would have to undergo training and receive a certificate from the Ohio Department of Agriculture before they could spread fertilizer. Those changes are in a Senate bill introduced yesterday. So is a provision that would keep the public from seeing any individual farmer's fertilizer and manure-management plans.

[SPOTLIGHT: Illinois Farmers Test Soil for Nitrogen](#)

San Francisco Chronicle

A group of scientists is working with Central Illinois farmers to reduce wasted nutrients and maximize crop yields, and it all comes down to how much nitrogen is in a few pellets of dirt. The Illinois Council on Best Management Practices, a coalition of agricultural businesses and organizations, is reaching out to farmers throughout Illinois for its N-WATCH program. The aim is to encourage farmers to test their soil for nitrogen levels in an attempt to eliminate wasteful use of nitrogen and to maximize crop yields, said Howard Brown, manager of agronomy services with Growmark, who is assisting in promoting the program. "N-WATCH is a program that allows a farmer to inventory and track (how much nitrogen is) there if he wants to make a management decision," Brown said. "We're trying to grow it into something that all the farmers can adopt."

[Florida Lagoon Mass Murder Mystery: Hundreds of Marine Animals Mysteriously Dead](#)

Headlines & Global News (HNGN)

Hundreds of animals have mysteriously washed up dead on the shores of the Indian River Lagoon in Florida, and scientists are scrambling to uncover this mass murder animal mystery, the Daily News reports. "The lagoon is in a full collapse, it is ongoing," Marty Baum of the Indian Riverkeeper told FOX News. Baum believes that the pollutant levels of the river from nearby farmland run-off may have reached a tipping point. He believes that too many loopholes in Florida law might prevent the water bodies from getting nutrient limits. Over 100 manatees, 300 pelicans and almost 50 dolphin were found dead along the northern stretches of the river, and biologists have no doubt that this is a serious problem. Also Covered in: [Fox News](#), [Daily Mail](#)

[Fertilizer Runoff Raises Iowa Nitrate Concerns](#)

Omaha.com

For much of last year, Iowa's most pressing agricultural problem was a drought that baked farm fields and crops, turning them brown and crumbly. Now the skies have opened up, providing one of the soggiest springs on record. But the rain has created a new, unexpected problem: It is washing fertilizer off the farms and into the rivers that provide drinking water to much of the state. Public officials say the problem will pass, but others worry about the potential risks of a compound called nitrate, which has reached levels never seen in Iowa. "These numbers are so high that they're not only problematic from an ecological standpoint for the rivers, lakes, ponds and reservoirs, but they become a real issue for human health," said Bob Hirsch, a research hydrologist for the U.S. Geological Survey, who studies long-term changes in river water quality.

Local Activities

[Smaller Chesapeake 'Dead Zone' Forecast](#)

Baltimore Sun

The Chesapeake Bay's "dead zone" this summer is on track to be smaller than usual for the second year in a row, scientists announced Tuesday. Based on estimates of rainfall-fed runoff the first five months of the year, researchers with the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and the University of Michigan project that the extent of oxygen-starved water in the Chesapeake is likely to be "at the low end" of previously measured "dead zones." Their forecasts, underwritten by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, call for a mid-summer "hypoxic" zone measuring 1.46 cubic miles, with another 0.26 to 0.38 cubic miles of water containing essentially no oxygen for fish and shellfish to breathe. Last year's mid-summer low-oxygen zone was roughly the same size.

[Keeping Nutrients Out Of Our Waterways](#)

Vermont Public Radio

Wed 6/26/13 Noon & 7PM Phosphorus is a building block for all life forms. But when it runs off our fields, streets and parking lots, it becomes a nutrient for aquatic life causing eutrophication of our waterways. And nitrogen also has its detrimental effects as well. Vermont's Ecosystem Restoration Manager Kari Dolan and UVM Professor of Water Resources Suzanne Levine discuss the science of nutrient runoff and the efforts by the state to contain them.

[Fertilizers, Nutrients on Land Too Much of Good Thing in Water](#)

Plain Dealer

After years of celebrating the revival of Lake Erie, which meant cleaner water, great fishing and recreational opportunities, it appears that our blue lake is turning green -- and not in a good way. The 1972 Clean Water Act led to visible water quality improvements in the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie. Fish and small aquatic animal populations slowly rebounded as a result of pollution controls on industry, better wastewater treatment and reduced phosphorus levels in cleaning products. Now, water quality levels are decreasing and the alarm bells are ringing again. The Western Basin of Lake Erie, located roughly from Toledo to Huron, is becoming seriously affected with toxic blue-green algae.

During the summer months, the algal blooms have been so bad that swimmers have emerged from Lake Erie covered in green slime.

Miscellaneous

[Tracking Nitrogen Through the Soil to Reduce Pollution From Agriculture](#)

DISCOVER Magazine

On this gray, drizzly winter morning, the California coastal mountains in the distance look like a mirage hovering over a flat swath of fields at Russell Ranch, a 300-acre experimental farm in the Sacramento Valley. One of the researchers in charge is Martin Burger, an angular, intense-looking Swiss ecologist. Nitrogen has many faces. It is an essential element on the periodic table. No organism, plant or human, can survive without it. Yet there is a short supply of accessible nitrogen in the world. In fact, had scientists not created synthetic, mostly natural-gas-based fertilizer decades ago to improve nature's method of "fixing" nitrogen — a process of breaking nitrogen molecules apart to make them available to plants — neither you nor I, nor most of the 7 billion people crowding the planet, would be here today.