



Healthy Waters Coalition Update

August 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 August.

Studies and Research

[Report: Conservation Work Minimizes Sediment, Nutrient Runoff](#)

USDA News Release

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced a new U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report that shows farmers have significantly reduced the loss of sediment and nutrients from farm fields through voluntary conservation work in the lower Mississippi River basin. Secretary Vilsack highlighted the value of conservation programs to these efforts, and called on Congress to pass a comprehensive Food, Farm and Jobs Bill that would enable USDA to continue supporting conservation work on farms and ranches. The [report](#), released by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) this week, marks the completion of a watershed-wide assessment of conservation efforts in the Mississippi River watershed.

[Lake Erie Algae Needs Tough Rules to Reduce Blooms, International Panel Says](#)

Associated Press, Detroit Free Press

The U.S. and Canada should crack down on sources of phosphorus runoff that's blamed for a rash of algae blooms on Lake Erie, an advisory agency said. The algae produce harmful toxins and contribute to oxygen-deprived "dead zones" where fish cannot survive. The International Joint Commission said in a [report](#) that urgent steps are needed to curb runaway algae — a problem that led both nations to reach their first agreement to improve Great Lakes water quality more than 40 years ago, when some considered Erie ecologically dead. Tougher standards for municipal and industrial waste treatment produced improvements by reducing the flow into the lake of phosphorus on which algae feeds. But the problem began worsening in the late 1990s. In 2011, the largest mass on record formed in the lake's western basin, and it eventually reached more than 100 miles from Toledo to Cleveland.

[Scientists Say Excessive Nutrient Runoff Causing Oxygen-Starved 'Dead Zone' in Green Bay](#)

Associated Press, The Tribune

Lake Michigan's Green Bay is developing a "dead zone" similar to sections of Lake Erie and the Gulf of Mexico where there's so little oxygen that few if any fish — or even tiny critters such as insects and worms — can survive, scientists said Thursday. The oxygen-deprived area may cover as much as 40 percent of the largest freshwater estuary in the Great Lakes, said Tracy Valenta, a water resource specialist with the Metropolitan Sewerage District of Green Bay, Wisconsin. The zone starts about 8 miles northeast of the city and can extend more than 30 miles from there, she said. The problem may have been around for many years but appears to be worsening, she said. In 1990, oxygen was measured at below life-sustaining levels on four summer days. By 2011, the low-oxygen period had reached 43 day

[Study: Sea Otters Combat Pollution](#)

Associated Press, Vacaville Reporter

The familiar sight of a sea otter floating on its back, meal on its belly, is more than a cuddly spectacle, research at a Central California estuary has found. A new study published by University of California, Santa Cruz researchers suggests that by eating crabs, sea otters are indirectly combating harmful effects of agricultural runoff and protecting the underwater ecosystem of Elkhorn Slough, an estuary near Monterey Bay about 75 miles southeast of San Francisco. Underwater sea grass, which has many environmental benefits including providing habitat for fish, is typically stifled by algae fueled by nutrients in agricultural runoff. But with otters present, the sea grass thrived through the cascading effect of the food chain, according to the study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

State Activities

[State Withdraws Farm Pollution Regulation](#)

Baltimore Sun

Maryland officials pulled back a proposed regulation aimed at reducing farm runoff polluting the Chesapeake Bay after chicken growers warned it could cripple the state's lucrative poultry industry if imposed now. The state Department of Agriculture announced it had withdrawn its request to make immediate changes to rules governing where farmers may use chicken manure to fertilize their crops, two days before a scheduled legislative hearing on the proposal. Agriculture Secretary Earl "Buddy" Hance said in a statement that the O'Malley administration wants to give farmers more time to adjust to the changes and intends to resubmit them next month after meeting with "key stakeholders." The rules, which would have taken effect this fall, would be put off until next year at the earliest.

[Farmers Apply for State Money to Reduce Runoff](#)

Seattle Post Intelligencer

Iowa farmers have applied for state funding to help them reduce the amount of fertilizer and manure runoff from fields on more than 120,000 acres. Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey says farmers submitted applications for \$2.8 million in cost share funding made available to help implement practices intended to help improve water quality. Since it's a cost-share program farmers will provide at least \$2.8 million of their money. Northey says the department received applications from 1,096 different farmers covering 120,680 acres. Practices include use of cover crops, no-till and strip-till farming and use of a chemical that slows the rate at which ammonia applied as fertilizer is converted to nitrogen.

[State Looking for Feedback on Cutting Nutrient Pollution](#)

Wisconsin Ag Connection

Wisconsin has made significant progress in cutting phosphorus that contributes to lower water quality in area waterways, but even more can be done. That's according to a draft nutrient reduction strategy now available by the state's natural resources department. "This strategy gives the big picture of where Wisconsin is right now and what we need to do to continue with the state's overall improvement to water quality," says Jim Baumann, the DNR's water resources engineer coordinating the effort. "We invite people to review the draft strategy. We want to hear from them on how we can all work together to improve water quality in our waters, which will also help water quality in the Gulf of Mexico."

[Florida Waters Alive With Toxic Algae, Toxic Politics](#)

Environment News Service

Environmental groups rallied ahead of a Florida State Senate Select Committee public meeting, demanding that government act to stop toxic algae slimes that are sickening people and killing dolphins, manatees, birds and fish in two areas of the state. On Florida's southeast coast, the St. Lucie River, its estuary, and the Indian River Lagoon are slimed with algae that grow on excess sewage, manure, and fertilizer runoff released locally and from Lake Okeechobee to the north. Most of the nutrient pollution entering Lake Okeechobee comes from tributaries in the northern Everglades that take runoff from the

Everglades Agricultural Area, which grows most of the sugarcane in the United States.

[State, Federal Groups Want More Public Input on Floyds Fork Pollution Measures](#)

WFPL News, NPR

Several state and federal agencies tasked with improving the water quality in the Floyds Fork watershed will hold meetings in September to gather more public input. The Floyds Fork watershed in eastern Jefferson County (and parts of other counties, including Bullitt, Shelby and Oldham) is polluted...mainly from nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen. For the past two years, the Environmental Protection Agency and the state Division of Water have been developing a plan to reduce the pollution in the stream by calculating a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or "pollution diet" for the area. Kentucky Water Resources Research Institute director Lindell Ormsbee says figuring out how to address nutrient runoff is a challenge, because it comes from many different places.

Local Activities

[Worcester Commissioners Object to Chicken Manure Proposal](#)

DelmarvaNow

Worcester County Commissioners are sending the state a letter of protest about an emergency regulation that will be heard in Annapolis that could immediately limit the use of chicken manure on state farms. The letter comes in response to a request from county commissioner and chicken farmer Virgil Shockley at a meeting of the commissioners. "This will have a dramatic impact on growers," Shockley said. "It came out of nowhere. Why is it an emergency, all of a sudden? We need to slow down and get some facts." The Maryland General Assembly's Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive and Legislative Review will hold an emergency hearing Aug. 28 in Annapolis regarding new regulations on the Phosphorous Management Tool.

[Conservation Groups: Pollution Monitoring at Hog Farm Not Enough](#)

Arkansas Times

A coalition of conservation groups offered measured support but some skepticism regarding Gov. Mike Beebe's proposal of independent, state-funded testing and monitoring at the C&H Hog Farm in Mt. Judea. The farm has stirred controversy because of its proximity to the Buffalo River. Earlier this month, the coalition -- the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance, the Arkansas Canoe Club, the National Parks Conservation Association and the Ozark Society -- sued the federal agencies that backed more than \$3 million in loans to C&H. A press release articulates what various coalition members have told me: additional monitoring is a good thing but doesn't address their core concerns, and they fear that if the testing does identify pollution, the damage at that point may have already been done.

Litigation Activities

[Judge Denies Legal Fees in Poultry Pollution Suit](#)

Baltimore Sun

A federal judge denied a bid by poultry producer Perdue and an Eastern Shore farmer to make the Waterkeeper Alliance pay more than \$3 million in attorneys' fees for its failed lawsuit alleging that the company and its contract grower were polluting a Chesapeake Bay tributary. Judge William M. Nickerson concluded that while he believed the New York-based environmental group had mishandled preparation of its case, that did not merit the rare sanction of making the losing alliance pay the other side's attorneys. But that might not be the end of the bitter, nationally publicized legal saga, which began nearly four years ago.

[Adams Heifer Raising Farm to Pay \\$65,000 Fine for Water Pollution Violations](#)

Madison.com, Capital Newspapers

The Wisconsin Department of Justice has obtained a judgment against Opitz Custom Heifers LLC that requires the company to pay \$65,000 in forfeitures, surcharges, costs and attorney's fees for violations of state water pollution control laws at the Opitz heifer operation in Adams County. Opitz Custom Heifers must also pay up to \$10,000 to replace a contaminated

private well on property adjacent to the heifer operation, as well as pay the costs of groundwater monitoring for at least the next two years. Opitz Custom Heifers, a large heifer-raising business that consisted of four separate properties located within a two-mile radius in Adams County in the town of Richfield and Lincoln, is classified as a concentrated animal feeding operation, or CAFO, and is subject to a facility-specific pollution discharge permit.

Miscellaneous

[The Nitrogen Cascade: The Next Big Pollution Problem](#)

Huffington Post

I know that your head is still whirling around thinking about climate change and what to do about it. The earth has hit the 400 parts per million level of carbon dioxide for the first time in 2 million years. The preponderance of drought, shrinking glaciers and super storms, plus actual bona fide peer-reviewed scientific evidence, erases any doubt to any rational educated person about the reality of climate change. I hate to break it to you, but we have another upcoming pollution problem that is just as bad -- The Nitrogen Cascade.

[In the Spotlight: Pass Farm Bill, Fund Conservation, Shrink 'Dead Zones'](#)

Journal Star

The news of this year's Gulf of Mexico dead zone should serve as a wake-up call to our nation's policymakers. Scientists supported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have been studying what is the largest hypoxic zone in the United States for nearly 30 years. They have just released their latest study showing this year's "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico is 5,840 square miles, above average for the last five years and about as large as the state of Connecticut! The abundant spring and summer rains that caused severe flooding along the Mississippi River and its tributaries also have caused the incredible size of this year's dead zone.