



Healthy Waters Coalition Update

September 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 September.

Studies and Research

[Report: Polluted Farm Runoff Linked to Toxic Green Algae Slime in U.S. Waters](#)

Washington Post

They call it the green slime, a toxic ooze of algae that covered lakes and other water bodies across the United States this summer, closing beaches in Wisconsin and Kentucky, and killing scores of dolphins, manatees, birds and fish in Florida, a report says. At least 21 states closed lakefront beaches and issued public health advisories as a result of toxic algae between May and September; last year 20 states took similar actions. Toxic algae is the byproduct of the same types of pollution that causes dead zones in the Gulf of Mexico and the Chesapeake Bay— phosphorous and nitrogen from livestock manure and chemicals sprayed on crops such as corn that spills from farms into assorted waterways during moderate to heavy rains.

[Task Force: Hitting 2015 Goal to Reduce Gulf of Mexico Dead Zone Unlikely](#)

Des Moines Register

Efforts will fall short of a 2015 goal to significantly shrink the size of the Gulf of Mexico's dead zone, despite "incremental improvements and significant investment" being made, the task force leading the charge says. "This report does a good job showing the significant progress that has been made and the work that still needs to be done," said Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey, co-chairman of the Hypoxia Task Force. The group is made up of members from five federal agencies and 12 state agencies. The group is working to reduce nitrogen and phosphorous levels in the Mississippi River Basin that contributes to dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico each summer the size of Connecticut.

[Soil Matters: How the Federal Crop Insurance Program Should Be Reformed to Encourage Low-Risk Farming Methods With High-Reward Environmental Outcomes](#)

NRDC Blog & Issue Paper

The Federal Crop Insurance Program (FCIP) is meant to protect farmers in times of weather-related devastation -- like the 2012 drought that cost farmers \$17.3 billion worth of crops, or the 2011 floods that caused \$10.8 billion in crop damage. As the harsh realities of extreme weather slam the countryside, FCIP, intended to alleviate risk for farmers, actually drives the agricultural community toward riskier farming methods and creates less resilient land. Partially as a result of FCIP policies -- which cover 70 percent of the nation's total cropland -- American farming has gravitated toward brittle, loss-prone fields.

State Activities

[Plan Aims to Bring Clarity to North-Metro Lakes](#)

Star Tribune

Five lakes and one creek in northeastern Ramsey County are the target of an intensive cleanup plan over the next several years to clear the waterways that are becoming choked by pollution. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) has drafted a plan estimated to cost about \$2.5 million to \$7 million over the next several years to reduce pollution levels in East and West Goose Lake, Gem Lake, Gilfillan Lake, Wilkinson Lake and Lambert Creek. The six bodies of water are clustered northeast and southeast around the junction of Interstate 35E and Highway 96. The lakes were declared impaired by the MPCA three years ago, and the creek was listed in 2008. "Those lakes have been plenty ripe this summer," said Mark Burch, chief engineer and public works director for White Bear Lake, speaking of East and West Goose Lake, which are connected. "The problem with those lakes is they have a very high phosphorus content, so there's been a huge algae bloom all summer."

[State Water Board Revises Agricultural Pollution Regulation](#)

Santa Cruz Sentinel

The California Water Resources Control Board approved revisions to the order, originally imposed by the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board in March 2012 to prevent harmful pollutants from leaving fields along with water discharges. The order was contested by farmers, who said some provisions were impractical, costly and not based in science, and by environmentalists who wanted tougher standards to protect drinking water and wildlife habitat from fertilizer and pesticide pollution. Both sides took their concerns to the state board. The decision represented the board's final response to the petitions, and includes establishing a panel of experts to resolve some of the thornier issues related to agricultural practices and monitoring

[Pollution Solution: Governor Announces Project Regarding Lake Okeechobee](#)

Fort Myers Beach Observer

Gov. Rick Scott announced a \$90 million environmental project last week to ease the flow of freshwater releases into Southwest Florida. Speaking in Centennial Park in Fort Myers, Scott said the state would invest \$30 million per year over three years to raise 2.6-miles of Tamiami Trail in the Everglades. The higher elevation will allow fresh water to be released south into the Everglades without the possibility of flooding the highway. The project will be through the Florida Department of Transportation, bringing the state's share of the \$180 million cost for the 2.6 miles of bridging to the \$90 million committed. Scott said other things are being done to protect the state's estuaries as well. "The state is doing the right thing. They are teaming up with the private sector and farms and doing things on public lands to store water so we can reduce this flow from Lake Okeechobee," said Scott.

[Wisconsin Reduces Fertilizer Runoff, But Has More To Do](#)

Hayward WI.com

The state of Wisconsin says it's making significant progress on reducing nutrient pollution in rivers, but a watchdog group for the Mississippi River says Wisconsin and other Midwest states need to do more. Wisconsin and other states in the Mississippi River basin are under orders to develop a strategy for reducing nitrogen and phosphorus runoff. The goal is to reduce nutrient pollution causing the biological 'dead zone' in the Gulf of Mexico. Department of Natural Resources water administrator Ken Johnson told the DNR board Wednesday that the amount of phosphorus going from state watersheds to the Mississippi is down 23 percent, and that the state can hit its target of a 45 percent cut. "We've had a major reduction in the percentage of point sources, and a reduction in non-point sources as well, too. So we're making progress. We're about halfway there; we're fairly pleased about that."

[Pennsylvania's Nutrient Trading Bill Pledges To Reduce Cost And Improve Results, But Will It Work?](#)

Ecosystem Marketplace

Ed Schafer and Harry Campbell both say they want to clean the Chesapeake Bay. They even seem to agree on the need to

stifle the flow of animal waste into the Bay from farms. What they can't agree on, however, is how Pennsylvania should structure its nutrient trading program, and specifically whether technologies like manure treatment should be recognized in that program. Proponents like Schafer want to create a competitive bidding process designed to recognize the most effective method of reducing nutrients, and they claim Senate bill 994 will produce better ecological results than techniques being used currently while cutting the cost of Bay cleanup for taxpayers by up to 80%.

Local Activities

[Long Island Partnership to Combat Polluted Waters](#)

Wall Street Journal

Long Island environmental groups are banding together to stem the flow of nitrogen into the region's groundwater and bays. The initiative announced Tuesday follows what environmentalists are calling the worst year on record for ecological problems related to nitrogen, a nutrient that feeds algal blooms blamed for devastating much of the island's marine life over the last three decades. The Long Island Clean Water Partnership is led by four well-established groups: Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Long Island Pine Barrens Society, the Nature Conservancy and Group for the East End. The partnership plans to spend about \$3 million over the next three years on a public-education campaign consisting of television and radio commercials, door-to-door canvassing and meetings with civic groups.

[Lawn Fertilizer Limits Take Effect, But Effectiveness Questioned](#)

Baltimore Sun

Among the hundreds of new laws taking effect Oct. 1 is one meant to help the Chesapeake Bay by limiting when, where and how Marylanders should feed their lawns. One scientist, though, suggests homeowners could help the bay better by forgoing lawn fertilizer altogether. The Fertilizer Use Act of 2011 restricts the nutrient content of all grass food sold in Maryland, barring phosphorus from most lawn-care products and setting limits on how much nitrogen should be applied. Though passed two years ago, its onset was delayed until now to give lawn-care companies time to train and certify their employees to meet new requirements. The law prohibits feeding a lawn from Nov. 15 until March 1, for instance. It also bars spreading near a water way or putting fertilizer down when heavy rain is forecast. And it forbids using fertilizer to de-ice sidewalks and driveways.

Litigation Activities

[EPA Can Go Forward With Plan to Limit Pollution in the Chesapeake Bay](#)

Washington Post

A federal judge upheld the Environmental Protection Agency's sweeping plan to limit pollution in the Chesapeake Bay, derailing the farm lobby's attempt to stop one of the largest efforts to clean a waterway in the nation's history. In a long-awaited decision, U.S. District Court Judge Sylvia H. Rambo wrote that "the ecological and economic importance of the Chesapeake Bay is well documented" and that the EPA is within its rights under the Clean Water Act to partner with the six states in the bay watershed to cut the pollution that pours in from sewers and construction developments, and particularly chemical and biological waste from farms.

[US Judge Gives EPA 6 Months to Decide Whether Regulations Needed for Farmland Runoff Pollution](#)

Washington Post

Environmental advocates in states along the Mississippi River have won a round toward a long-term goal of having federal standards created to regulate farmland runoff and other pollution blamed for the oxygen-depleted "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico and problems in other bodies of water. In a ruling Friday, U.S. District Judge Jay Ziney in New Orleans gave the Environmental Protection Agency six months to decide whether to set Clean Water Act standards for nitrogen and phosphorous in all U.S. waterways or explain why they're not needed. The EPA describes the nutrients on its website as "one of America's most widespread, costly and challenging environmental problems," affecting every state.

