



Healthy Waters Coalition Update

October 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 October.

Farm Bill

[Healthy Waters Coalition Seeks Inclusion of Senate Nutrient Provisions](#)

HWC circulated a letter to all of the Farm Bill conferees Tuesday urging the adoption of provisions related to nutrient management and water quality goals, successfully secured in the Senate Farm Bill as part of a newly established Regional Conservation Partnership Program, in the ultimate bill. Specifically, the provisions would ensure that nutrient management activities on the farm receive priority conservation funding, allow farmers that are part of a partnership agreement to receive five-year contracts and special payments for nutrient management-related activities, clarify that municipal water and wastewater entities are eligible partners, and explicitly state that partnerships which execute innovative water quality improvement measures are eligible for conservation funding. The letter can be found [here](#).

Studies and Research

[Nitrate Levels Continue to Increase in Mississippi River; Signs of Progress in the Illinois River](#)

USGS Report

Nitrate levels in the Illinois River decreased by 21 percent between 2000 and 2010, marking the first time substantial, multi-year decreases in nitrate have been observed in the Mississippi River Basin since 1980, according to a [new USGS study](#). Unfortunately, similar signs of progress were not widespread. "Nitrate levels continue to increase in the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, including the Mississippi's outlet to the Gulf of Mexico," said Lori Sprague, USGS research hydrologist. "These results show that solving the problem of the dead zone will not be easy or quick. We will need to work together with our federal and state partners to develop strategies to address nitrate concentrations in both groundwater and surface water," said Lori Caramanian, Department of the Interior Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science.

[Nutrient Pollution Threatens National Park Ecosystems, Study Says](#)

Los Angeles Times

National parks from the Sierra Nevada to the Great Smoky Mountains are increasingly being fertilized by unwanted nutrients drifting through the air from agricultural operations, putting some of the country's most treasured natural landscapes at risk of ecological damage, a new study has found. Thirty-eight of 45 national parks examined by scientists are receiving doses of nitrogen at or above a critical threshold that can harm sensitive ecosystems, such as lichens, hardwood forests or tallgrass prairie, scientists found. "Changes to lichen communities may signal the beginning of other ecosystem changes that can

eventually alter the function and structure of the community as a whole," the study says.

[Climate Change, Pollution Increasing Toxicity of Algal Blooms](#)

Nature World News

Climate change and nutrient enrichment via pollution appear to be contributing to a rise in toxicity of some algal blooms in freshwater lakes and estuaries worldwide, researchers found. Scientists from Oregon State University and the University of North Carolina determined that as nutrient enrichment increases, so do toxin-producing strains of cyanobacteria in harmful blooms. At 3.5 billion years old, cyanobacteria are one of the world's oldest microorganisms, and are believed to have produced the oxygen that ultimately gave rise to life. So many years later, they've evolved so as to pose a threat to the life they originally helped create.

[Nitrate Pollution Continues for Decades After Fertilizer Use](#)

Los Angeles Times

Nitrates from agricultural fertilizer could continue to leach into groundwater for at least 80 years after initial use, according to researchers who conducted a long-term study of nitrogen uptake. Using isotope tracers, scientists followed the fate of nitrogen-based synthetic fertilizers applied to fields planted in France with wheat and sugar beets. They found that three decades after the 1982 application, 61% to 65% of the nitrates had been taken up by plants. Much of the rest continued to reside in soil matter (12% to 15%) or was migrating into groundwater (8% to 12%).

State Activities

[Ohio EPA Nutrient Reduction Strategy to Measure 'Health of Streams'](#)

Farm and Dairy

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency is awaiting Congressional action on a Nutrient Reduction Strategy that it submitted to the federal EPA June 28. The proposal seeks new limits on the amounts of phosphorus and nitrogen that can enter Ohio's various streams and water bodies, but in relation to the aquatic life in a particular stream, and other biological factors. "This will provide a more robust analysis by looking at the biological and chemical measurements to determine the complete health of a stream or a river," said Chris Abbruzzese, deputy director of communications for Ohio EPA.

Local Activities

[Miami Conservancy District Reduces Nutrient Pollution Through Credit Trading](#)

Environmental Monitor

Ten years ago, representatives from Dayton, Ohio's Miami Conservancy District met with citizens from the Great Miami River Watershed to discuss water quality issues they were facing. "Community members asked us to help them address water quality issues in our rivers and streams," said Sarah Hippensteel Hall, Miami Conservancy District manager of watershed partnerships. "A major part of the pollution problem is nutrients." Agricultural land makes up more than 70 percent of the 5,371 square miles of the Great Miami Watershed. Runoff from farming operations causes nutrient pollution and sediment loading in the river basin.

[Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Chicago's Metropolitan Water Reclamation District Discuss Nutrient Recovery's Crucial Role in Combatting Water Pollution](#)

Ostara Press Release

Environmental advocate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. spoke October 8 about the significant benefits that nutrient recovery will provide to Chicago area watersheds with the news that the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) will begin recovering phosphorus and nitrogen from its Stickney Water Reclamation Plant in the fall of 2015. "Nutrient pollution is one of the greatest challenges facing this country's waterways," said Kennedy. "Ostara's advanced nutrient recovery technology not only reduces nutrient load but helps protect precious area waterways that are part of

Mississippi River basin.

[James River Receives 'C' for Overall River Health](#)

Williamsburg Yorktown Daily

The James River Association released its biennial State of the James report card, giving the river a C — 53 percent — for its overall health in 2012. The James River is graded on several categories to reach its overall grade: wildlife, habitat, pollution and river protection and restoration. In some categories, such as habitat and river protection and restoration, the river scored better than in others. Overall, the river's grade improved 2 percent over 2010. "The modest 2 percent overall increase reflects progress made in advancing restoration and protection actions and the resulting pollution reductions and habitat improvements," the report reads.

Litigation Activities

[Farm Groups to Appeal Bay Cleanup Ruling](#)

Daily Press

Citing a "remarkable power grab" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, farm groups said they plan to appeal a judge's recent decision to uphold federal pollution limits and cleanup efforts for the Chesapeake Bay. The American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Corn Growers Association filed separate notices to appeal this latest ruling on their lawsuit, first filed in 2011. "This case isn't about whether or not to protect the Chesapeake Bay — we all share that goal," AFBF president Bob Stallman said in a statement Tuesday. "This case is about whether EPA can dictate where farming can be allowed, where homes can be built and where businesses can be established." Stallman said the federal Clean Water Act "puts states in the drivers' seat" on such matters, not the EPA.

[Court Ruling Forces EPA Action on Mississippi River Pollution](#)

Wisconsin Public Radio

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.

[W.Va. Chicken Farmer Wins Lawsuit Against EPA Over Stormwater Runoff, Permit Requirement](#)

Daily Journal

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has no legal right to force a West Virginia poultry grower to obtain water pollution permits for runoff from her Hardy County farm because it is routine stormwater discharge, a federal judge ruled Wednesday. U.S. District Judge John Preston Bailey said litter and manure washed by rain into Chesapeake Bay tributaries at Lois Alt's Hardy County farm is agricultural runoff, not a fixed pollution source such as a factory. That means it's exempt from the requirement that it be permitted and regulated under the federal Clean Water Act, he said. "The term 'agricultural stormwater discharge' was not and has not been defined in the statute" covering permitting, Bailey wrote.