



Healthy Waters Coalition Update

November 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 November.

Studies and Research

[Large Study Shows Pollution Impact on Coral Reefs — and Offers Solution](#)

Phys.org

One of the largest and longest experiments ever done to test the impact of nutrient loading on coral reefs today confirmed what scientists have long suspected – that this type of pollution from sewage, agricultural practices or other sources can lead to coral disease and bleaching. A three-year, controlled exposure of corals to elevated levels of nitrogen and phosphorus at a study site in the Florida Keys, done from 2009-12, showed that the prevalence of disease doubled and the amount of coral bleaching, an early sign of stress, more than tripled.

[Nutrient Time Lag May Slow Chesapeake Bay Cleansing](#)

Delaware Online

It could take two to four decades or more to see significant water quality improvements in Chesapeake Bay tributaries on the Delmarva Peninsula because nitrogen-enriched groundwater moves so slowly through the system, according to a new U.S. Geological Survey study. The findings may have implications for measuring the success of a federal mandate to cut nutrient pollution of the Chesapeake Bay by 2025. For the Maryland and Delaware parts of the Delmarva Peninsula, the target is a 25 percent reduction in the 2009 nitrogen nutrient load – about 5,000 tons of total daily nitrogen – by the end of this decade.

[Report: Pollution Levels in Wisconsin River Rising](#)

Portage Daily Register

Levels of nitrates and phosphorous are rising in many sloughs of the Wisconsin River, causing concern among anglers from Iowa, Sauk and Columbia counties, and the author of a new study suggests the river should be placed on a national list of endangered bodies of water. Last summer, Dave Marshall, an aquatic biologist, hydrologist and former Department of Natural Resources biologist, conducted a study of the nitrate and phosphorous levels in some sloughs and ponds fed by the Wisconsin River. Marshall now owns a research consulting firm, Underwater Habitat Investigations, and often is hired to conduct such studies.

State Activities

[Minnesota Seeks Input on Water Pollution Reduction](#)

Independent

Minnesota is a headwaters state. Forty-one states drain into the Mississippi drainage basin, eight states drain into the Great Lakes and four into Lake Winnipeg. But only the waters of Minnesota drain into all of them. That makes Minnesota the starting point of any discussion addressing the issue of water pollution. Nutrient runoff from agriculture containing nitrogen and phosphorus is a significant problem, causing a "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico where aquatic life can't survive and oxygen-depleting algae blooms in the Great Lakes and Lake Winnipeg.

[2013 Nutrient Management Standard Released in Iowa](#)

National Hog Farmer

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recently released the new Iowa Nutrient Management Conservation Practice Standard – the guiding document for implementing nutrient management plans for Iowa farmers. Iowa's 11-page Nutrient Management (NM) or 590 Standard provides farmers guidance regarding managing the rate, source, placement, and timing of the application of plant nutrients and soil amendments. This includes animal manure, commercial fertilizer, legume credits, green manure, and crop rotations. The Standard is updated every five years.

[Farmers Speak Out on Latest Nutrient Regulation](#)

County Times

Maryland farmers are sharing their concerns about a proposal to update the phosphorus measurement portion of their nutrient management plans. The Phosphorus Management Tool (PMT) is designed to be more sensitive to the potential for phosphorus to move from farmland. Hundreds of family farmers spoke at recent briefings, are filing official comments and will voice their opposition at an upcoming hearing. While leading the nation in management practices that protect the environment and the Chesapeake Bay, farmers in the Free State believe there are too many unanswered questions with this latest regulation that could put them out of business.

[Maryland Shouldn't Backtrack on Manure Pollution](#)

Baltimore Sun

All across our great state, Marylanders are sharing the responsibility of cleaning up our polluted waterways. Residents should not and will not accept the frequent occurrence of algae blooms, dead zones, sick fish and "no swimming" signs in our rivers, streams and the Chesapeake Bay. Thankfully, Maryland is making progress to reduce pollution to meet our obligations under the federal-state Chesapeake Bay Blueprint, a comprehensive cleanup plan for the bay. We've made terrific strides on implementing state-of-the-art technologies at our sewage treatment plants. There are efforts underway in our most populous counties to tackle polluted runoff.

Local Activities

[Task force: Farmers Must Cut Runoff to Save Lake Erie](#)

Columbus Dispatch

To reduce the algae blooms that threaten Lake Erie's tourism economy and public health, phosphorus runoff into northwestern Ohio tributaries to the lake should be cut by 40 percent, a state task force recommended yesterday.

Neighboring states and Canada must also make the lake a priority if its health is to be restored, members of the Ohio Lake Erie Phosphorus Task Force said. "It's extremely critical," said Jeff Reutter, the director of the Ohio Sea Grant College program and Stone Laboratory on the lake. The task force's report has 20 recommendations. It calls on Ohio farmers to voluntarily adopt farming practices that can reduce phosphorus runoff from their fields.

[Montgomery Pollution Plan Found Lacking](#)

Baltimore Sun

Environmental groups scored a win last week in their lawsuit contending that Montgomery County's state-mandated plan for curbing polluted runoff is lacking. Montgomery Circuit Court Judge Ronald B. Rubin ordered the Maryland Department of the Environment on Wednesday to revisit the storm-water permit it had issued the county in 2010 requiring reductions in pollution and trash from county streets, parking lots and existing buildings.

Environmentalists had challenged the permit, arguing that it violated the Clean Water Act by failing to specify reductions needed in harmful discharges of nutrients, sediment and bacteria into the county's rivers and streams.

[Lake Cleanup Proposal Focus of Meetings](#)

Times Argus

An effort to clean up Lake Champlain is moving forward, and state and federal officials are looking for input on a recently released draft proposal to reduce the amount of phosphorus being carried into the lake. Because much of the pollution comes in runoff from fields and yards, the proposal has many implications for agriculture. Other major components of the plan focus on stormwater, river channel stability, forestry management, and watershed protection and restoration. Six meetings have been scheduled beginning next week as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state seek comments on the draft "Proposal for a Clean Lake Champlain."

[Bioreactors, Component of Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy, Help Reduce Fertilizer Runoff](#)

The Gazette

A new woodchip bioreactor will reduce nitrates in tile water draining off an 80-acre Lanehaven Farms field about four miles south of here. The bioreactor – one of several components of the state's Nutrient Reduction Strategy – has the potential to substantially reduce the volume of nitrogen fertilizer polluting Iowa's surface water. "It is one of many solutions we will implement to improve water quality," said Blake Hollis, a partner with his dad, Curtis Hollis, and other family members in Lanehaven Farms. The Hollises consider themselves early adopters of technological advances that foster both productivity and sustainability. They employ many of the practices recommended in the state's Nutrient Reduction Strategy including conservation tillage, cover crops and spoon-feeding fertilizer to reduce costs and limit non-point pollution.

Litigation Activities

[Pollution Rules Watered Down? Environmental Groups Sue California Water Resources Control Board](#)

Santa Barbara Independent

A coalition of statewide environmental organizations — including Santa Barbara's Channelkeeper — sued the California Water Resources Control Board, charging that the new conditions imposed on contaminated agricultural runoff do not go far enough in protecting surface streams and underground water supplies from further pollution. The new document is "so weak," according to California Rural Legal Assistance attorney Pearl Kan, "that it allows agricultural discharges to further degrade surface and ground water quality," even though state regulators recognize "many water bodies are severely impaired." Or as Ben Pitterle of Santa Barbara Channelkeeper put it, "The language kept getting weaker and weaker. Finally, we said enough is enough."

Miscellaneous

[Ag Retailers Leading Nutrient Stewardship](#)

Ag Professional

Ag retailers are taking an active role helping farmers adopt best practices to manage nutrients and improve both farmer profitability and water quality. "Nutrients are key resources required to grow crops," reports Thomas Green, Ph.D., president of the IPM Institute. "When nutrients are lost from cropland, farmers lose money and water quality can suffer. Ag retailers are in the forefront of developing innovative and effective solutions." For example, Iowa ag retailers joined together to form Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance, a nonprofit funded by contributions from fertilizer sales. The Alliance is tackling nitrogen losses from cropland in the Des Moines and Raccoon River watersheds in west-central Iowa.