**Healthy Waters Coalition Update**
***December 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. Please feel free to circulate this list to your members and let us know if you have any colleagues who would find this monthly update informative. 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 December.*

***Studies and Research***

Improving Water Quality: A Review of the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) To Target U.S. Farm Conservation Funds
*World Resources Institute*
This paper provides an assessment of the USDA's Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI), a promising new approach to achieving cleaner water in agriculturally dominated watersheds in the United States. The initiative concentrates a portion of taxpayer-supported conservation funds in high-priority, targeted watersheds, which we found to be a better strategy than the prevailing approach of thinly dispersing funds across the rural landscape. With a few mid-course adjustments, the initiative could help achieve measurable improvements in many local streams and rivers. WRI's analysis and recommendations can help USDA and its many partners—state agricultural and water quality agencies, watershed groups, universities, and farm and environmental non-governmental organizations—as they strive to demonstrate environmental outcomes with ever-shrinking taxpayer funds.

Poultry Matter: What To Do With All That Chicken Shit?
*Grist*
Nitrogen and phosphorous runoff from agricultural activity is a major source of water pollution in many parts of the country. In the Chesapeake Bay watershed, half of the phosphorous and 40 percent of the excess nitrogen result from agricultural runoff, leading to algae blooms and destructive conditions for the bay's legendary fish, oysters, and crabs. A report from the Pew Charitable Trusts on the chicken industry, published over the holidays to little notice, identifies a significant contributor to the problem and proposes a useful solution. Almost all chickens raised for meat today are grown under contracts between growers and large companies such as Tyson, Pilgrim's, and Perdue.

***Federal Activities***

Report Shows Conservation Practices Reduce Runoff of Nutrients, Sediment in Chesapeake Bay Watershed
*USDA Chesapeake Bay Update*
On December 5, 2013, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced the release of the CEAP-Cropland report on the effects of recently installed conservation practices on cropland in the Chesapeake Bay region. This new report, using data collected in 2003-06 and 2011, demonstrates that during the time between the two surveys, agricultural producers have significantly increased their use of an array of conservation measures to improve and

protect water and soil quality in the Chesapeake Bay region. These conservation practices are generating substantial natural resource benefits for producers and the communities of the Chesapeake Bay region.

***State Activities***

Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy Set to Enter Next Phase

*The Gazette*

Eight watershed demonstration projects covering 606,000 acres have been selected to receive $4.1 million in funding through the Iowa water quality initiative over the next three years. The projects — the next phase in the state's nutrient reduction strategy — will familiarize farmers with effective means to curb the excess runoff of nitrogen and phosphorus that is polluting water from Iowa to the Gulf of Mexico, said Matt Lechtenberg, water quality initiative coordinator with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey said the demonstration projects will encourage more farmers to adopt water quality practices.

Minnesota Seeks Input on Water Pollution Reduction

*Marshall 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. Now the Minnesota Water Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is seeking public input on a proposed nutrient reduction strategy as part of a combined effort by 12 states along the Mississippi River.

***Local Activities***

Madison's Lakes Are 'Impaired' by Runoff-Driven Weeks and Algae, State Says

*Wisconsin State Journal*

The state will add Dane County's chain of lakes to its list of "impaired waters" because of heavy nutrient pollution from surrounding farmland that causes unnatural weed growth and nasty-smelling algae blooms, state officials said Friday. Dane County officials expressed concern that the listing of the four Yahara lakes — Mendota, Monona, Waubesa and Kegonsa — might upset or undermine extensive cleanup efforts already underway in cooperation with local farmers. It would be the first time the lakes landed on the state list because of nutrient pollution. "Being listed as impaired brings a lot of negative attention," said Melissa Malott, executive assistant to County Executive Joe Parisi. "We are working with the farmers as never before. I don't understand exactly why (the state) would be doing this now."

Program Aids Farmers and Ranchers to Reduce Polluted Runoff

*The Tribune*

Farmers and ranchers in Los Osos and Chorro valleys can receive help in managing their operations to reduce runoff from their lands that can pollute the Morro Bay National Estuary. The Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District offers the services of an engineer to update farm and ranch plans, providing recommendations and design practices aimed at improving water and fertilizer efficiency, storm water management and grazing practices. "The RCD's agricultural water quality program is tailored to the individual grower or rancher's needs and may include cost share funds to implement priority projects," said G.W. Bates, district engineer. The program, which will continue through 2015, is supported by a $400,000 grant from the State Water Resources Control Board.

**Litigation Activities**

EPA Appeals District Court Ruling to Exempt Farmyard Runoff From Discharge Permits

*Bloomberg BNA*
The Environmental Protection Agency has asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit to review a district court ruling that said the agency can't require farmers to obtain Clean Water Act discharge permits for agricultural stormwater runoff from farmyards (Alt v. EPA, 4th Cir., No. 13-2534, appeal filed 12/23/13). The Dec. 23 appeal by EPA follows an Oct. 23 ruling by the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of West Virginia holding that stormwater runoff from litter and manure is exempt from National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permitting requirements under Section 402 of the Clean Water Act (Alt v. EPA, 2013 BL 218814, N.D. W.Va., No. 2:12-cv-00042, 10/23/13; ).

Bay Pollution Trading Lawsuit Dismissed
*The Baltimore Sun*
A lawsuit challenging the use of pollution "trading" to clean up the Chesapeake Bay was thrown out Friday, removing another legal hurdle to a federally imposed plan to restore the ailing estuary's water quality. Judge Rudolph Contreras in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia granted a motion by the Environmental Protection Agency to dismiss the lawsuit brought against it by two environmental groups. The groups, Food & Water Watch and Friends of the Earth, had sued the EPA in October 2012, contending that a market-based cleanup program that is part of the agency's "pollution diet" for the bay violates the federal Clean Water Act and would undermine — rather than help — efforts to restore the Chesapeake.

***Miscellaneous***
How Mass-Produced Meat Turned Phosphorus Into Pollution
*National Public Radio*
It's a quandary of food production: The same drive for efficiency that lowers the cost of eating also can damage our soil and water. Take the case of one simple, essential chemical element: phosphorus. Phosphorus is one of the nutrients that plants need to grow, and for most of human history, farmers always needed more of it. "There was this battle to have enough available phosphorus for optimum crop production," says Kenneth Staver, a scientist with the University of Maryland's Wye Research and Education Center, which sits between farm fields and the Chesapeake Bay on Maryland's Eastern Shore. That's also the tension in this story: agriculture on one side, and water quality on the other.