



Healthy Waters Coalition Update

April 2015

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 and other materials from the month of April.

National Activities

[USDA funding to help clean waterways in Mississippi River basin](#)

USDA Press Release

Targeted conservation work in the Mississippi River basin will unite the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), farmers and local organizations to help clean waterways that flow into the nation's largest river. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is investing \$10 million this year in 27 new high-priority watersheds and 13 existing projects that will help improve water quality and strengthen agricultural operations. This investment is part of a commitment of \$100 million over four years to address critical water quality concerns in priority watersheds while boosting rural economies.

[U.S. EPA Avoids Stricter Water Pollution Standards for Gulf of Mexico](#)

Circle of Blue

On April 7, though, three justices of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the lower court's decision on *Gulf Restoration Network v. McCarthy* and ruled that the EPA need only provide a "reasonable explanation" for refusing to make the determination. The lawsuit now goes back to the district court, which will decide if the agency's explanation is itself reasonable. The latest court decision is a setback for efforts to restore aquatic health and reduce the size of the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico, but it also maintains that the EPA's decisions on the matter are not "immune" to judicial scrutiny.

State Activities

[Pollutants likely to create longest dead zone yet in Green Bay](#)

Journal Sentinel

The tide of nutrients from the Fox River and other tributaries will help create the latest, and most likely, longest-lasting dead zone in Lake Michigan's Green Bay this summer. The problem is caused by vast amounts of phosphorus and other nutrients that wash from farms and urban landscapes and produce conditions that create oxygen-deprived stretches on the bay. In the Great Lakes region, public concern about dead zones and nutrient-caused pollution has been growing in recent years.

[Farmers vow to reduce phosphorus, bane of Green Bay](#)

WisconsinWatch

By one key metric, Green Bay's phosphorus problem is not improving. Nonetheless, many of the roughly 150 people at a Wednesday summit on the problem were hopeful, because they saw farmers and others in agriculture acknowledging their part in the problem and talking about solutions. U.S. Rep. Reid Ribble, R-Wisconsin, who hosted the summit at the Neville Public Museum, said it was designed to "stop pointing fingers at each other and start pointing fingers at solutions."

[Farm Bureau tackles water quality](#)

limaohio.com

In the wake of increasing concerns over nutrient levels in Ohio's waterways, the Ohio Farm Bureau released a water quality status report Monday, outlining how the agricultural organization plans to address this issue. In the report, the OFB outlined an action plan for how it will address water quality, including committing \$1 million in member funds to water quality efforts, encouraging member farmers to complete fertilizer certification and hiring additional water quality staff.

[Plan to curb runoff too costly, unworkable, farmers tell Dayton](#)

MPR News

Dayton recently called for farmers to keep a 50-foot vegetative buffer along all streams and lakes in the state, a step he says is urgently needed. State law already requires a 50-foot buffer, but enforcement is spotty across the state. The governor's plan would give state officials power to enforce the provision uniformly across Minnesota.

[Tainted drinking water is costing Minnesota taxpayers millions](#)

StarTribune

Randall's water emergency is the latest sign of an environmental problem in Minnesota. Nitrogen fertilizer is leaching into groundwater from farm fields, contaminating wells and costing taxpayers millions of dollars a year. Sixteen communities have violated the state health limit for nitrates, and half have installed expensive nitrate-removal systems at a cost per household of \$3,300 or more.

Regional and Local Activities

[Major Egg Producer Agrees to Reduce Water Pollution Discharges at Mississippi Facility](#)

EHS Today

Cal-Maine Foods Inc. has reached an agreement with EPA and U.S. Department of Justice that resolves Clean Water Act violations at the company's poultry egg production facility in Edwards, Miss. Under the settlement, Cal-Maine will bring the facility into compliance with its state-issued water discharge permit, significantly reduce nutrient pollution discharges and improve environmental data collection and reporting practices. The company also will pay a \$475,000 penalty to be split evenly between the U.S. Federal and Mississippi governments.

[Conflict Over Soil and Water Quality Puts 'Iowa Nice' to a Test](#)

New York Times

The flat, endless acres of black dirt here in northern Iowa will soon be filled with corn and soybean seeds. But as farmers tuned up their tractors and waited for the perfect moment to plant, another topic weighed on their minds: a lawsuit filed in federal court by the state's largest water utility. After years of mounting frustration, the utility, Des Moines Water Works, sued the leaders of three rural Iowa counties last month.

[The real story on nitrate levels in Iowa's rivers](#)

Des Moines Register

Nitrate levels in Iowa's major rivers have increased more than threefold since the 1950s, but have stabilized — and even slightly declined — in recent decades, according to an in-depth review of available research. The studies lend credence to both sides of the ongoing argument over Iowa's water quality — farm groups that say Iowa's nitrate levels are improving vs. Des Moines Water Works' complaint it needs to spend millions of dollars in the years ahead to clean water to meet federal standards of no more than 10 milligrams of nitrates per liter.

Research and Studies

[New Approach to Farming Hopes to Save Water Quality](#)

Local ABC

A new approach to farming could be the answer to better water quality and cleaner lakes. Wapak hosted a Cover Crop Specialist to help educate local farmers. Jeff Rasawehr, a native of the Mercer County area, now travels the U.S. and Canada with Center Seeds advocating for an agriculture system of biology and soil management. There are 6 main steps to restore the integrity of the microbiology of the soil. This focuses on balancing the fungi and bacteria so that all nutrients will be held and taken up.