



Healthy Waters Coalition Update February - March 2014

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 months of February and March.

Farm Bill Implementation

The National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is working quickly to implement the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), a new program authorized by the Farm Bill this year which incentivizes partnerships between agricultural producers and non-agricultural entities including municipal water and wastewater agencies and conservation organizations. Though NRCS is still in the very early stages of implementing the program, NRCS Chief Jason Weller has indicated to stakeholders during a series of listening sessions that request-for-proposals (RFP) will likely be released during the spring and that USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack will likely designate Critical Conservation Areas (CCA) in the near future before the RFP is released so potential partners in these target areas can begin planning projects. Projects that are located outside a CCA are still eligible for funding. Potential partners who are considering developing a RCPP proposal are encouraged to contact their [State Conservationist](#) early in this process to receive additional information and technical assistance to help put together a partnership proposal, should this be necessary.

Federal Activities

[Farm Bill Passes After Three Years of Talks](#)

Washington Post

Congress gave final approval February 4 to a sweeping overhaul of a broad range of federal farm and nutrition policies affecting what farmers grow, how food is packaged and sold and how the government helps poor people pay for their groceries. The Senate voted [68-32](#) to approve a new, five-year farm bill that the House passed last week. The measure heads next to President Obama, who is expected to sign it in the coming days. After nearly four years of haggling between Democrats and Republicans, the \$956.4 billion package was unveiled last week and sailed through Congress in just a matter of days.

State Activities

[Trading System Tackles Waste: New Plan Pays Farmers to Curb Agricultural Runoff that Pollutes the Gulf](#)

[of Mexico](#)

Wall Street Journal

Kevin Hollinger planted radishes and oats last fall in his corn and soybean fields, but he isn't planning to harvest them. Instead, he is letting the crops die over the winter to improve the soil and keep fertilizer and other nutrients from running into nearby waterways. "I could hardly go to town without someone asking: 'What's that in your field?' " said Mr. Hollinger, a fourth-generation farmer. Helping to foot the bill for his experiment is a pilot program set to launch fully next month. Farmers in the Ohio River basin are being paid to make changes—from what they plant to how they handle manure—in an effort to minimize runoff that can cause hypoxia, or low oxygen levels, in waterways.

[Duke, American Electric Buy in Nutrient Pollution Auction](#)

Bloomberg

Duke Energy Corp. and two other coal-burning electric utilities bought \$90,000 worth of credits in a pilot program designed to reduce fertilizer-laden runoff from farmland. Participating farmers agreed to plant cover crops, erect silt fences or find other ways of keeping 4.5 tons of nitrogen and phosphorous from washing into the Ohio River basin, said Christopher Mahoney, a spokesman for the Electric Power Research Institute, a program sponsor. Because air-pollution controls at coal-burning power plants capture nitrogen, utilities want to see if a nutrient market might help nitrogen disposal, Jessica Fox, director of the program for the EPRI, said today in a telephone interview.

[Melt Brings Manure Runoff Warning](#)

Republican-Eagle

Warm temperatures mean shrinking snowbanks across the region, but the rapid melting brings the threat of manure runoff into nearby waters, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency said. The MPCA is calling on farmers who spread livestock manure on cropland during winter months to take steps to ensure it doesn't flow into ditches and streams — which could add phosphorus and nitrogen to already nutrient-polluted waters. "Producers should consider short-term stockpiling of manure in the field until after the major snowmelt of the year," Wayne Cords, a supervisor with the MPCA's feedlot program, said in a news release.

[Iowa NRCS Warns Against Winter Runoff](#)

Iowa Farmer Today

The NRCS is reminding Iowa farmers to refrain from surface applying manure and fertilizer to frozen, snow-covered or saturated soils. Eric Hurley, nutrient management specialist for the NRCS in Des Moines, says applying manure to snow-covered or frozen soil can easily wash away during a rapid snowmelt or during early spring rains. "Manure is too valuable of a resource and fertilizer is too expensive to risk runoff," he said in a news release. "Not to mention the environmental impacts it would cause." Hurley says potash is not considered a water pollutant, but since it is such an expensive fertilizer to apply, winter application may be a risky investment that could be lost through runoff.

Regional and Local Activities

[Aq Committing for Cleaner Lake Erie Water](#)

Ag Professional

As new regulations are being considered to be imposed on agriculture, the agriculture community with waters going into Lake Erie is launching a proactive, responsible commitment aimed at the long-term improvement of Lake Erie's water quality. Harmful algal blooms in the Great Lake and other bodies of water in the area have been on the rise the past five years, leading to increased water treatment costs and

negative impacts on fishing and tourism. Farmers have taken many actions to improve soil health and reduce fertilizer runoff, but nutrients leaving fields and entering streams and lakes continue to contribute to water quality problems.

[White House to Honor Steuben Farmer](#)

Journal Gazette

Growing up on an Ohio hog farm made Carrie Vollmer-Sanders a conservationist. "My first science fair project was about manure management," Vollmer-Sanders, 33, recalled Monday. Conserving soil and water "was something we always talked about as a family," the Angola resident said. Her current work to keep fertilizer runoff out of Lake Erie has caught the attention of the Obama administration. The White House announced Monday that Vollmer-Sanders is among 14 people selected as recipients of Champions of Change awards "for their efforts to engage communities and youth in environmental stewardship and conservation." The awards will be presented Tuesday morning at the White House.

[Puget Sound Shellfish at Risk](#)

Good Food World

By the time the first settlers reached the small spit of land that was ultimately to become part of Seattle Washington in 1850, the Olympia oyster population on the Pacific coast was already beginning to be over harvested. And in the early 1900s, poor water quality in Puget Sound threatened to finish it off. More than a century later, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska have a significant hatchery-based oyster industry and are now the major producers of the Pacific oyster in the U.S. The non-native Pacific oyster, first imported in the early 20th century, is the most important commercial oyster species in the region.

[Board of Public Works Approves \\$356,807 in Agricultural Cost-Share Grants](#)

The Baynet

The Maryland Board of Public Works last week approved \$356,807 in Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share grants to help farmers install best management practices that significantly reduce nutrient runoff in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and accelerate Bay restoration. The O'Malley-Brown Administration has supported more farmer pollution reduction projects cost-share program than any other administration in the nearly three decades since the program began. The Board approved grants for 26 projects in seven counties that will prevent soil erosion, manage nutrient pollution and safeguard water quality in streams, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay.

Litigation Activities

[Lawyers Put State on Notice Over Indian River Lagoon Pollution](#)

Gazette Extra

If any community should know, it's the town of Delavan. Since the 1960s, town and city officials and local residents have been working to keep Delavan Lake healthy, both for homeowners and for the tourism trade that helps drive the local economy. But in recent years, the philosophy of who should handle lake management issues—and how they should be handled—has changed. Those changes aren't linked to science but to how local officials think money should be spent. Between 1989 and 1992, millions of dollars were sunk into the lake to eliminate rough fish and phosphorus-induced algae that made the lake muddy and green. Wetlands with retention ponds were developed north of the lake to help treat water and retain sediment.