Healthy Waters Coalition Update
October 2014 – January 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 months of October and November.

Federal Activities

Agriculture Secretary Announces Funding for 115 Conservation Projects in 50 States--Farm Bill Initiative Marks New Era for Conservation efforts
USDA
Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that 115 high-impact projects across all 50 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico will receive more than $370 million in Federal funding as part of the new USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). In addition, these projects will leverage an estimated $400 million more in partner contributions—for a total of nearly $800 million—to improve the nation's water quality, support wildlife habitat and enhance the environment. Vilsack made the announcement near Phoenix, where the new program will invest in a project with five local partners to clean and conserve water along the Verde River, a tributary of the Colorado River.

EPA awards $8.6 million to state agencies in Ohio, Michigan and Indiana to fight algal blooms
Crain's Cleveland Business
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Monday, Oct. 20, awarded about $8.6 million to state agencies in Ohio, Michigan and Indiana to help combat harmful algal blooms in western Lake Erie. Ohio will receive the vast majority of the money from the Great Lake Restoration Initiative grants. The grant money goes to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources ($5.9 million), the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency ($1.5 million), the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development ($807,000) and the Indiana Department of Agriculture ($360,000) and will fund eight projects.

Interior, Agriculture Departments Partner to Measure Conservation Impacts on Water Quality
USGS Report
The United States Department of the Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a new partnership agreement today that will provide a clearer picture of the benefits of farmers' conservation practices on the quality of our Nation's water. Working together, USDA's NRCS and DOI's USGS will quantify the benefits of voluntary agricultural practices at a watershed scale. This information will strengthen the effectiveness of state and federal nutrient reduction strategies while protecting the privacy of individual farmers. The agreement was announced at the Mississippi River Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force Meeting.

State Activities

Iowa's Largest City Sues Over Farm Fertilizer Runoff In Rivers
NPR
Des Moines, Iowa, is confronting the farms that surround it over pollution in two rivers that supply the city with drinking water. Des Moines Water Works says it will sue three neighboring counties for high nitrate levels in the Raccoon and Des Moines rivers. It's a novel attempt to control fertilizer runoff from farms, which has been largely unregulated. Stowe says the source of these nitrates is pretty clear. Farmers spread nitrogen fertilizer on their corn fields, it turns into nitrate and then it commonly runs

into streams through networks of underground tile pipes that drain the soil. Those drainage systems are managed, in some cases, by county governments, and Des Moines Water Works is now proceeding on the theory that those governments can be held legally responsible for the pollution that their pipes carry.

Farm regulators increase scrutiny of water quality
Capital Press
Increased scrutiny of water quality by Oregon's agriculture experts may convince landowners to voluntarily improve stream conditions on their properties. A project aimed at restoring riparian habitat along several creeks in Oregon's Multnomah County has hit a roadblock. Despite numerous entreaties from the local soil and water conservation district, most landowners have refused free streamside tree planting that would reduce temperatures in the creek. Increased scrutiny of water quality by Oregon's agriculture regulators may help the state's soil and water conservation districts overcome such resistance among landowners.

Input sought on Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy draft
Agrinews
A proposal aimed at reducing the amount of phosphorus and nitrate-nitrogen reaching Illinois waters by 45 percent is open for public comment until Jan. 24, 2015. The highly anticipated Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy describes a comprehensive suite of best management practices that will help the state reduce its phosphorus load by 25 percent and its nitrate-nitrogen load by 15 percent by 2025 and to eventually reach the 45 percent target. The strategy addresses wastewater treatment plants and urban and agriculture runoff. It was developed by the Illinois Water Resources Center, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and state Department of Agriculture. Group members included representatives from state and federal agencies, agriculture and non-profit organizations, as well as scientists and wastewater treatment professionals.

Iowa League of Cities looks at water-quality trading
The Des Moines Register
With Iowa cities facing more than $1 billion in improvements to meet new nutrient-reduction requirements, the Iowa League of Cities is investigating developing a water-quality trading program that officials believe could help cut their costs. Under the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, about 100 municipal wastewater treatment plants will be required to cut the amount of nitrogen entering the state's rivers and streams by 66 percent and phosphorus by 75 percent. Dustin Miller, the league's general counsel, said a water-quality trading program would allow cities to work upstream with farmers, ranchers and others to add conservation practices and infrastructure that improves water quality, but at reduced prices

Nutrient pollution trading in limbo in Maryland as it expands in Virginia
The Baltimore Sun
While the Obama administration is touting Virginia's pollution trading program as an "innovative market-based approach" to cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland's trading effort remains stuck in limbo after years of study and debate. Maryland has been working since 2008 to set up its own nutrient pollution trading program - but has yet to register a single transaction.

Teaming up for Iowa's water
The Des Moines Register
The conservationist hired to lead Iowa agriculture's newest effort at reducing runoff from farm fields wants partners — big food and beverage corporations, elevators and cooperatives, private foundations, seed and fertilizer companies, even agriculture's biggest critics. McMahon and the three agriculture powerhouses that formed the alliance — the Iowa Pork Producers, Soybean Association and the Corn Growers Association — face a significant challenge: Reduce by 45 percent the nitrogen and phosphorous that make their way into Iowa waterways and contribute to the Gulf of Mexico's dead zone.

Governor Cuomo Announces $39.5 Million for Water Quality Improvement Projects Across the State
Long Island News
Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced $39.5 million in grants to provide funding for 134 local and regional projects across New York State. The projects are aimed at improving water quality, reducing polluted runoff and restoring water bodies and aquatic habitats in each region of the state. This funding will provide assistance communities need to increase resiliency against storms, implement effective pollution control projects and better protect critical natural resources for years to come.

EPA Approves Missouri's New Water Quality Standards, But Do They Go Far Enough?

St. Louis Public Radio
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has signed off on a major overhaul of Missouri's water quality standards. The state approved the new regulations in November but needed federal approval to start enforcing them. John DeLashmit directs the water quality management branch for EPA Region 7. He said prior to this, about 80 percent of Missouri's waters lacked the specific pollution limits required by federal law. The Missouri Department of Natural Resources estimates that to comply, the state's wastewater treatment plants may need to spend more than $1.1 billion in capital costs to disinfect and remove ammonia from their discharges, along with tens of millions more in additional annual operation and maintenance costs.

DNR Mapping Software Helps Reduce Runoff, Phosphorus Pollution
Wisconsin Ag Connection
A new software tool developed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is being touted as an effective way to help reduce agricultural runoff and erosion. Developed to integrate satellite imaging and geographic information system or GIS technology, the erosion vulnerability assessment for agricultural lands tool--known as EVAAL--depicts areas susceptible to runoff based on topography, land cover and soils. Detailed maps produced by the software highlight areas where large gullies or tiny rills may carry nutrients away from fields and toward bodies of water.

Illinois EPA designing plan to reduce nitrogen, phosphorous in waterways
Rockford Register Star
The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency plans to release a "document of strategic actions" in November, designed to reduce the amount of nitrogen and phosphorous in the state's rivers and lakes. The document is the result of months of talks between environmentalists, agriculture interests, municipal wastewater agencies, academics and others to develop the plan. And Illinois is not alone. Other states in the Mississippi River basin have been working on similar plans, partly in response to federal efforts to address problems in the Gulf of Mexico caused by nutrient runoff.

Iowa Watershed Improvement
KMA Land
Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey today encouraged eligible groups to apply for grants to support projects that will improve water quality in the state. Approximately $830,000 is available through the Watershed Improvement Review Board to support qualifying projects. Projects eligible for funding include, but are not limited to, those addressing agricultural runoff and drainage, flood prevention, stream bank erosion, municipal discharge, storm water runoff, unsewered communities, industrial discharge and livestock runoff.

Water quality falling, treatment costs rising
The Des Moines Register
Iowa's policy to address national water pollution — the nutrient reduction strategy — continues to fail, despite the public relations investment of its many industrial agriculture advocates and many Iowa policy makers. September 2014 set another record for Des Moines Water Works and our 500,000 water customers. This is the first September, since at least 1974, in which Des Moines Water Works recorded an average nitrate concentration in the Raccoon River above the Environmental Protection Agency's drinking water standard of 10 mg/l.

Alabama NRCS Revises Nutrient Management Standard
Southeast Ag Net
State Conservationist Dr. William Puckett today announced that the USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Alabama has revised its conservation practice standard on nutrient management. This conservation practice standard will help producers manage the application of nutrients on agricultural lands in Alabama. NRCS' nutrient management experts worked with universities, non-government organizations, industry, and others to revise the standard to ensure it is scientifically sound.

Regional and Local Activities
Algae threatens Wabash River
AgriNews
On a late August morning a day after heavy rains, the Wabash River looked the color of caramel syrup as it meandered toward Bluffton. A week later, it was back to its usual late summer tint — leaf green, from all of the algae in the water. Just as excess nutrients in the Maumee River and its tributaries contributed to the algae problem that shut down the drinking water system in Toledo, Ohio, for two days in early August, nutrient pollution causes similar problems in the Wabash.

Board of Public Works Approves $187K in Agricultural Cost-Share Grants

WBOC16
The Board of Public Works approved more than $187,000 in Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share grants this week, including grants for counties on the Eastern Shore. The Maryland Department of Agriculture says the grants help farmers install best management practices that significantly reduce nutrient runoff in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and accelerate Bay restoration. The MDA says 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.

Research and Studies
Study shows boombacks reduce run-off by 24%
The Prairie Star
Irrigation Accessories Co. (IACO) is delighted to announce that independent results confirm its' 15 foot Hose Booms™ reduced the amount of run-off by 24% during a multi-pass center pivot irrigation test. The study, which was completed by Dr. Peters and 4 other prominent members of the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers clearly states: 1. A 24% reduction in run-off by the 5th pass 2. The use of boom systems is an effective way of lowering the water application rate by increasing the wetted sprinkler area thus minimizing soil surface sealing and encouraging infiltration of water into the soil. 3. Minimizing runoff will result in water savings, savings in pumping costs and minimize crop water stress.