



Healthy Waters Coalition Update May 2016

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 May.

National Activities

[USDA Announces \\$10.7 Million Available For Critical Water Research](#)

USDA Press Release

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced the availability of \$10.7 million in funding for research that could solve critical water problems in rural and agricultural watersheds across the United States. This funding is available through the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and administered by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

[U.S. EPA Announces 28 Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Grants Totaling Over \\$12.5 Million to Restore Great Lakes](#)

EPA Press Release

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today announced 28 Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grants for projects to restore and protect the Great Lakes. The grants, totaling more than \$12.5 million, were announced at an event near Toledo, Ohio. EPA grants were divided into four categories: invasive species prevention, invasive species control, urban watershed management implementation and agricultural watershed management implementation.

State Activities

[Does Minnesota have the solution to better water quality?](#)

Des Moines Register

Minnesota's approach, fueled with about \$100 million annually in dedicated funding, has resulted in perhaps the Midwest's most comprehensive water quality program — with buffers required on public

waterways and ditches, comprehensive testing and monitoring, a watershed strategy designed to cut runoff from rural and urban areas, and established water quality goals. But Minnesota faces a mountain of uncertainty over its prospects for success. And state leaders say widespread conservation adoption is years away.

[Random acts of conservation: Water quality depends on farmers' willingness, not regulation](#)

MPR News

Farming is a big part of Minnesota's clean water problem. With little authority to compel farmers to adopt clean water practices, state and federal agencies rely on a voluntary approach. A variety of experts agree that even if all Minnesota farmers followed best practices in water management, the results would only get the state about halfway to its water quality goals.

[Interactive map details nutrient management efforts](#)

AgriNews

Dozens of farmers from across Illinois are sharing their nutrient management stories on a web-based interactive map. Several agriculture and conservation groups have launched the conservation story map that highlights farmers who are implementing best management practices, as well as local and regional programs that support their efforts. The interactive map allows users to click on farmers in their area and learn about practices their neighbors are using that also might work for them.

[Farm-to-farm inspections to begin soon as part of Chesapeake Bay cleanup 'reboot'](#)

LancasterOnline

New, stricter plans to curb farm runoff could mean a new burden of compliance for farmers in Lancaster County, where agriculture is a big part of the local economy. Pennsylvania is six months into its intensive 18-month plan to reduce nutrient pollution into the Susquehanna River, but the boots-on-the ground efforts will be launched soon. At the heart of it will be farm-to-farm inspections to make sure farmers have state-required manure-management plans and erosion and sediment control plans.

Regional and Local Activities

[Farm Bureau can choose to be a sore loser or part of the solution](#)

Bay Journal

The long and expensive fight by the American Farm Bureau Federation, the Fertilizer Institute and their allies to derail the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint is finally over. The Supreme Court refused to hear their appeal of a lawsuit that they had lost in both the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg and in a unanimous decision by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia. Now that their legal opposition has finally been turned back, we reached out to the Farm Bureau and its allies to encourage them to work with us, rather than fight us.

[Smarter farming: Wisconsin pact aims to keep pollution out of lakes](#)

Tri-Valley Dispatch

In a water cleanup effort more complex than any other in the nation, virtually every community in the 360-square-mile watershed around Madison has agreed to pool resources with farmers to eliminate nutrient-driven weed and algae growths that limit use of lakes and streams. The agreement signed by about 60 local governments will pool more than \$2 million annually for 20 years starting Jan. 1 to pay for measures that keep soil and other material laden with the nutrient phosphorus from being carried into surface water by snow melt and rain.

[Scientists are feeling good about a 'C' grade for Chesapeake Bay](#)

CNN

Conditions may be "poor to moderate" in Chesapeake Bay but scientists still found a reason to celebrate. America's largest estuary got a C (53%) on its health report card for 2015. That's its highest score in a non-drought year since 1992 and it represents the third year of consecutive growth, according to researchers at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. The continued improvement in the absence of a major drought suggests efforts to reduce pollution are paying off, said Bill Dennison, vice president for science applications at the center.

[Should farmers or city pay to clean the water? Iowa may decide](#)

MPR News

The Des Moines Water Works is now suing 10 rural Iowa drainage districts, arguing that farm runoff should fall under federal codes regulating water quality and human health. If that happens, it could shift the costs of filtering farm effluent directly onto rural Iowa and its farmers. A trial is set for June 2017. Iowa farmers say the added expense could ruin them. But the suit could bring historic change to water regulation and farm economics across the country, including Minnesota.

[Chicago turning river pollutants into fertilizer](#)

Chicago Tribune

Scientists, regulators, lawyers and advocates have been debating how to tackle Chicago's phosphorus discharge problem for years. Now a private company is promising to scour some of the phosphorus from the Stickney plant's effluent and turn it into slow-release fertilizer — a project local officials contend is a model for other communities in the region. The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, the taxpayer-funded agency that operates the Stickney plant, agreed to finance the Ostara Nutrient Recovery Technologies project while facing court challenges from environmental groups that want more stringent legal limits on the district's phosphorus releases into local waterways.

Research and Studies

[Illinois River water quality improvement linked to more efficient corn production](#)

Phys Org

Good news - the quality of water in the Illinois River has improved in one important aspect. A new study from the University of Illinois reports that nitrate load in the Illinois River from 2010 to 2014 was 10 percent less than the average load in the 1980s and early 1990s. Reducing the nitrate and phosphorus loads in the Mississippi River by 45 percent is the US EPA's ultimate recommendation.

[New water-quality data on impact of corn, soybeans on nitrate in Iowa streams](#)

Phys Org

As Iowa farmers have planted more acres of corn to meet the demand driven by the corn-based ethanol industry, many models predicted that nitrate concentrations in Iowa streams would increase accordingly. However, recent IIHR research based on water monitoring and published in the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* casts doubt on these predictions.

[USDA Report Shows Farmers Adding More Nutrients, Pesticides to Soybeans](#)

KTIC

Farmers are feeding soybeans more fertilizer and pesticides, according to the latest Ag Chemical Usage report released by the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). The organization only surveys specific crops every few years, and soybeans were studied in 2015.

Nutrients Applied

Miscellaneous

[Forget Cars: Cows And Fertilizer Could Be A Big Pollution Problem](#)

ThinkProgress

it's not just the water that is being polluted by fertilizer use. A new study published in *Geophysical Research Letters* found that fertilizer use — as well as animal agriculture — is a significant contributor to air pollution worldwide. When ammonia combines with other gaseous pollutants, like nitrogen oxides and sulfates from vehicles or power plants, it forms tiny particles, no larger than 2.5 micrometers across.