



October 2021 | Issue 9

HTF HIGHLIGHTS

STATE ACTIVITIES

FEDERAL ACTIVITIES

RESOURCES

Hypoxia Task Force Highlights

The Hypoxia Task Force is planning a virtual public meeting in December 2021. More information will be shared [here](#) as it becomes available.

State Activities

Iowa’s Online Dashboard Modernizes Nutrient Reduction Strategy Reporting to the Public

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa Department of Natural Resources and Iowa State University have announced advancements to the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy’s reporting process. A new online dashboard provides access to data, findings, and reports on Strategy implementation through visual reporting tools, such as on the use of land, in-field and edge-of-field nutrient reduction practices and structural erosion control practices in Iowa agriculture, and on wastewater and industrial facility permits identified in the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy. This revised reporting structure aims to increase the timeliness, frequency, and transparency of updates on Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy efforts and nutrient loss as data is collected from a variety of sources and partners. Each update will include information on one of the “measurable indicators of desirable change” — inputs, human, land and water — that guide the Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

[Read More](#)

Illinois Publishes Third Nutrient Reduction Loss Strategy Biennial Report

The Directors of the Illinois Department of Agriculture (DOA) and Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the release of Illinois’ third Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRs) Biennial Report. The Report describes the continued progress and challenges to address nutrient losses from multiple sources to improve water quality and reduce the hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Implementation of the statewide NLRs is guided by the Illinois EPA and DOA and University of Illinois Extension with the Policy Working Group and other stakeholder groups.

The 2015 Illinois NLRS established a goal to reduce the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus in Illinois waterways by 45%, with interim reduction goals of 15% nitrate-nitrogen and 25% total phosphorus by 2025. Like other states, Illinois faced unprecedented challenges, including extreme flooding in 2019, followed by the global pandemic in 2020. Despite these events, partner organizations, working both collaboratively and independently, remained committed to the Strategy with the assistance of virtual meetings and ongoing engagement and implementation. The next Biennial Report will be published in 2023.

[Read the Report](#)

Louisiana's Nutrient Reduction Strategy Supports a Nonpoint Source Water Quality Analysis

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) Section 319 Clean Water Act (CWA) Nonpoint Source (NPS) program was awarded \$160,000 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help the state implement its Nutrient Reduction Strategy and collaborate with the Hypoxia Task Force. Using these funds, LDEQ began sampling in March 2020 to collect chemical and physical data using EPA-approved methods that characterize water quality conditions at selected monitoring sites in four of Louisiana's priority watersheds. This monitoring effort brings a quantitative understanding of existing water quality conditions throughout the watersheds, knowledge of where high nutrient concentrations occur, and identification of the agricultural areas that are potentially impacting water quality in the watershed. LDEQ and partners will use this data to strategically target opportunities for reducing NPS loadings to improve overall watershed health and restore watersheds to meet designated uses. Data is made available in the [Water Quality Portal](#).

[Read More About the Methodology](#)

Federal Activities

EPA Publishes Recommended Nutrient Criteria for Lakes and Reservoirs

EPA has published revised recommended ambient water quality criteria under the CWA to help address nutrient pollution in lakes and reservoirs. As the first update to EPA's nutrient criteria in 20 years, these recommendations represent a significant advancement in the scientific understanding of the impacts of nitrogen and phosphorus in U.S. waters. These new criteria will help protect drinking water sources, recreational uses, and aquatic life in the nation's lakes and reservoirs. The new recommendations are based on statistical stressor-response relationships developed from data collected in approximately 1,800 lakes nationwide and incorporated into national models. The national models are designed so that states, territories, and authorized Tribes can also incorporate local data into the models to account for unique local conditions. States, territories, and authorized Tribes can consider adopting the recommended criteria into their water quality standards but are not compelled to revise existing EPA-approved criteria or total maximum daily load (TMDL) targets.

[Read More](#)

EPA Publishes a CyanoHABs StoryMap

EPA has published an ArcGIS StoryMap that will allow the public to learn about and track reported cyanobacterial harmful algal blooms (cyanoHABs) in freshwaters across the country. CyanoHABs can harm ecosystems and contaminate freshwaters with toxins that can lead to serious human health impacts. There is scientific consensus that the incidence of cyanoHABs has increased in the nation's freshwater systems in recent years, in part due to climate change. The StoryMap creates a single online resource for information about cyanoHAB events across the U.S. It consolidates freshwater advisory and closure information from state environmental and health agencies into user-friendly, interactive maps. In addition, the story map includes links to information on freshwater harmful algal blooms (HABs) causes and effects; several EPA tools on HABs preparedness and response; and state and local HAB resources such as the laboratories that perform analysis of water samples for cyanotoxins. These maps can help the public better understand the occurrence of cyanoHAB events and public and private sector partners further explore the causes of cyanoHAB formation.

[Access the StoryMap](#)

EPA Provides Implementation Support for Recreational HABs Criteria

EPA has published the Final Technical Support Document: Implementing the 2019 Recommended Recreational Water Quality Criteria or Swimming Advisories for Microcystins and Cylindrospermopsin to help states, territories, and authorized Tribes protect swimmers from two cyanobacterial toxins (cyanotoxins) produced by cyanoHABs. This document provides assistance on how states, territories, and authorized Tribes may adopt EPA's 2019 recommended criteria for the two cyanotoxins into their water quality standards or use the criteria in swimming advisory programs. The document also addresses implementation of the 2019 criteria recommendations through other CWA programs including identifying and listing of impaired waters, and TMDL development.

[Read More](#)

EPA and USDA Announce Winners of the Next Gen Fertilizer Innovations Challenge

At the end of October, EPA and USDA announced the winners of the Next Gen Fertilizer Innovations Challenge, the second of a two-part, joint Partnership and Competition on Enhanced Efficiency Fertilizers (EEFs) to Advance Agricultural Sustainability in the United States. The goal of the competition is to improve the efficiency of fertilizers to increase crop yields while reducing the impacts of fertilizers on the environment.

Winners of the challenge submitted concepts for novel technologies that can reduce the environmental effects of nitrogen and phosphorus from modern agriculture while maintaining or increasing crop yields. The winning solutions use nanoparticles that require less fertilizer and release nutrients on demand to growing plants, and then biodegrade into harmless substances or even nutrients; support greater plant growth from the same or less fertilizer application; and other approaches.

[Read More](#)

Resources

New Tool to Build Farmer Leadership in Watershed Management

Tap Your Potential: A Training to Grow Farmer Leadership in Watershed Management is a curriculum for watershed coordinators, outreach professionals, and educators from nonprofits, and government agencies who want to recruit the involvement of farmers in watershed-based efforts. It was developed by a team of Extension professionals from universities in the Mississippi River Basin. With a “plug and play” format, the customizable curriculum creates a space for farmers to explore what it means to be a leader in watershed management and to discover pathways to exercise their leadership. While farmers are the primary target audience, it is also appropriate for farm advisors, who also play an important role in influencing farmers’ decisions to adopt conservation practices.

[Read More](#)

SWCS Conservation Practitioner Poll 2021 Summary Report

Conservation practitioners are the delivery system for natural resource conservation across the nation. Employees of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Departments (SWCDs), state conservation agencies, and nongovernmental conservation organizations work directly with farmers and landowners to implement conservation practices through technical assistance, conservation planning, and program implementation. Despite the critical role that conservation practitioners play in helping farmers protect the nation’s natural resources, the voice of conservation practitioners is largely absent from policy discussions. Without a direct feedback mechanism from conservation practitioners, policy makers are at a disadvantage as they develop policies and programs that guide conservation implementation across the nation. To address this lack of direct feedback and elevate the perspectives of conservation practitioners, the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) has published the 2021 Conservation Practitioner Poll Summary Report from a survey designed to regularly collect data on the needs and recommendations of conservation practitioners.

[Read More](#)

Visit the EPA Hypoxia Task Force Website

To learn more about the work of the Hypoxia Task Force, visit our website, which features recent reports and measurements, important documents, upcoming actions, and learning opportunities. The “In the Spotlight” section of the homepage provides a great introduction.

[Check out the HTF Homepage](#)

[Sign Up for the HTF Newsletter](#)

The Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Task Force Newsletter is a quarterly publication produced by EPA’s Office of Water in partnership with the

Hypoxia Task Force. The newsletter provides a snapshot of recent state activities, federal agency activities, publications, and resources.

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