



2023 Hypoxia Task Force Public Meeting & Networking Session Summary Accomplishments and Next Steps

The [Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force \(“Hypoxia Task Force” or “HTF”\)](#) hosted the public portion of their 38th meeting on the afternoon of December 6, 2023. This document summarizes the main outcomes of the public meeting; public meeting materials can be found [here](#).

State Progress

The Hypoxia Task Force and the public heard from Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana and Minnesota on the first year of their workplans under the [Gulf Hypoxia Program created by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#), summarized below. The EPA’s Gulf Hypoxia Program is funding the 12 HTF states for up to five years. Attendees also heard remarks from Co-chair Michael Naig, Secretary of the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, regarding states’ commitment to sustained progress.

Arkansas is implementing goals and strategies in the recently updated [Arkansas Nutrient Reduction Strategy](#). Projects implemented focus on water quality monitoring and conservation practice implementation in high priority (Tier 1 and Tier 2) watersheds. In its presentation, Arkansas discussed the advancement of their nutrient reduction strategy and implementation practices through Arkansas’s Discovery Farms program.

The **Indiana** State Department of Agriculture has hired a staff person to help manage its work under the Gulf Hypoxia Program and to provide support for the [Indiana State Nutrient Reduction Strategy](#) efforts. The new staff person is managing their recently launched [Soil Sampling Program](#), which is aimed at increasing 4R stewardship, nutrient use efficiency on Indiana farmland, nonpoint source pollution reduction, greenhouse gas reductions and water quality improvements. Indiana has also created the Indiana Nutrient Research and Education Program to continue and expand the work of the [Indiana Science Assessment](#), which focuses on quantifying nutrient reduction from conservation practices and determining conservation practice effectiveness in improving water quality.

Kentucky is providing staffing for nutrient reduction strategy deployment and nutrient management planning in support of the state’s [Nutrient Reduction Strategy](#). Also, Kentucky will prioritize nutrient investments in municipal stormwater and wastewater treatment systems and increase funding for agriculture conservation practices. Funding will expand outreach and marketing of the state’s new Agriculture Water Quality Act Planning Tool and fill gaps in its

stream gaging network. Kentucky's presentation highlighted partnerships in place and recent efforts to enhance engagement on its nutrient reduction strategy.

Louisiana, to support its [Nutrient Reduction Strategy](#), is targeting implementation of agricultural best management practices within prioritized tracts in northeast Louisiana and transect monitoring in coastal Louisiana. The presentation highlighted efforts to target best management practices within the Lake St. Joseph watershed to reduce agricultural nutrient loading and provide other water quality improvements. The presentation also highlighted coastal monitoring and their efforts to transition to autonomous monitoring from Inshore to Offshore in Coastal Louisiana.

Minnesota is focusing on eight areas integral to the state's nutrient reduction goals. This work will set strategic directions for scaling up the most critical agricultural best management practices to achieve nutrient reduction goals at the state lines and at the upstream watershed outlets. Minnesota will map priority watersheds, develop templates for point source nitrogen reduction management plans for use at the highest priority municipal wastewater facilities and enhance the effectiveness of tools for nutrient reduction planning in local watersheds. Minnesota's [Nutrient Reduction Strategy](#) and tracking system will be updated to more effectively achieve and track nutrient reductions through 2035.

Partner Member Progress

Three sub-basin committees and one land grant university consortium play a critical role in facilitating sub-basin and basin-wide communications, collaboration and information sharing. The Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (Upper Mississippi Sub-Basin Committee) and the Land Grant University Consortium, Southern Extension and Research Activities committee number 46 (SERA-46), provided overviews of their Gulf Hypoxia Program workplans that will support states and other stakeholders in the Basin to advance Action Plan goals. These projects will begin in 2024.

The **Upper Mississippi River Basin Association** will develop an integrated, interstate nutrient reduction strategy; facilitate continuous learning and interstate collaboration; and lead an effort to establish a basin-wide communications strategy.

SERA-46 provided an overview of the group's priorities, including strengthening networks, conducting conservation research and outreach, and monitoring and tracking progress in the Basin. SERA-46 plans to support these objectives and the goals of the Action Plan via the Gulf Hypoxia Program by coordinating with sub-basin committees, states and other HTF members to synthesize and share progress made in monitoring, implementation of nutrient reduction strategies, and challenges and opportunities to address Gulf hypoxia. SERA-46 will also work to develop a basin-wide communications strategy. The Gulf Hypoxia Program will allow SERA-46 to sustain and expand existing initiatives such as [The Confluence for Watershed Leaders](#) and

[One Good Idea](#), both of which are successfully engaging and connecting watershed professionals and farmers. Finally, SERA-46 plans to convene researchers to identify research priorities and opportunities for sharing resources, culminating in a research agenda to advance nutrient reduction goals.

Federal Agency Support

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The EPA is implementing the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, including \$50 billion to address drinking water, storm water, and other water quality projects, and \$60 million over five years to help HTF states implement the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan.

The EPA released the fourth Hypoxia Task Force [Report to Congress](#) in December 2023, which describes progress toward the goals of the [Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan](#). The report is an important tool for describing the HTF's progress toward reducing nutrient loads to the northern Gulf, amplifying state summaries of progress, sharing lessons learned in implementing nutrient reduction strategies, and adaptively managing strategies for improving water quality in the Gulf.

U.S. Department of Agriculture

The USDA is providing \$19.5 billion in additional funding for existing conservation programs under the Inflation Reduction Act to incorporate and facilitate climate change mitigation practices. Projects implemented with Inflation Reduction Act funds will provide co-benefits in the Mississippi River basin including soil health and water quality. In FY23, 83 percent (\$105.6 million) of Inflation Reduction Act obligations and 93 percent (\$51.5 million) of Farm Bill obligations benefitted water quality in HTF states. Authorization under the Inflation Reduction Act will continue to increase from under \$1 billion in FY23 to over \$7 billion in FY26 alone. These new and growing funds support the National Water Quality Initiative and the Mississippi River Basin Initiative, both of which have been approved by NRCS Chief Terry Cosby to continue beyond FY23.

The Research, Education, and Economics agencies Agricultural Research Service, Economic Research Service, and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture also supported the HTF efforts through intramural research and extramural research funding.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NOAA provided an update to the HTF summarizing its 2023 cruise survey to measure the extent of the 2023 hypoxic zone, including results from a retrospective analysis of hypoxic dynamics over the past year and the potential application of autonomous vehicles for hypoxia monitoring. This information supports the HTF's goal of measuring and reducing the size of the hypoxic zone on an annual basis.

U.S. Geological Survey

The USGS continues to support the HTF in sharing trends of flow-normalized nitrogen and phosphorus loads to the Gulf of Mexico. These data are available on the [Tracking Water Quality in U.S. Streams and Rivers website](#).

Public Comments

The HTF heard oral comments from five members of the public. The HTF also received written materials that are posted at <https://www.epa.gov/ms-htf/hypoxia-task-force-meeting-agendas-and-related-information>. Members of the public can reach out to the HTF at any time throughout the year by writing to OW-hypoxia@epa.gov or contacting any state regarding their [nutrient reduction strategy](#).

Public Networking Session

Immediately following the public meeting, Arkansas hosted a networking event sponsored by Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation and Springdale Water Utilities. This event provided the public an open forum to engage with Task Force members.