

Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Task Force Newsletter

January 2021 | Issue 6

HTF HIGHLIGHTS

STATE ACTIVITIES

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Hypoxia Task Force Highlights

At the [Fall 2020 Virtual HTF Meeting](#), each of the Task Force's ten workgroups reported out on their activities and progress. These workgroups include seven formed at the February 2020 HTF meeting to address state priorities for collaboration on implementing nutrient reduction strategies, and three long-standing workgroups. Through active leadership by state, federal, tribal, and sub-basin coordinating committee members, states continue to make progress on their nutrient reduction efforts.

State Activities

PBS video highlights Iowa Water Quality Project

PBS recently released a short video entitled *Farmers in One Iowa County Help City Cut Mississippi River Nutrient Flows*, highlighting the partnership between the Dubuque County Soil & Water Conservation District and Iowa business owners to improve water quality. Through the eyes of a Dubuque restaurant owner and a Cascade farmer, the film showcases two Iowans' actions in the context of a larger effort to reduce nutrient loading as part of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Exchange.

[Watch here](#)

Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy Partnership Workshop

In early November, Illinois hosted their annual Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy Partnership Workshop, which brought together more than 60 partner organizations and 166 attendees from across all sectors to share ideas, discuss progress on reducing excess nutrients, and hear from other HTF member states on their strategies. In the five years since Illinois' strategy was released, partners—led by the University of Illinois Extension—have dedicated more than \$340 million towards implementing the strategy and connected with more than 133,000 Illinois residents via outreach and education programs. Featured presentations from Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Ohio, highlighted progress made to date and upcoming research priorities.

[Read more](#)

Indiana Launches 4R Certification Program

The Agribusiness Council of Indiana launched Indiana's 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program, a voluntary program for its members that encourages agricultural retailers and independent crop consultants to adopt proven best practices through the 4Rs: Right Source of Nutrients at the Right Rate and Right Time in the Right Place. Participation in the 4R program is a proactive commitment aimed at the long-term improvement of water quality.

To earn or maintain certification, retailer businesses are audited by a private, third party auditor via an in-person audit. They are audited on their use of best practice standards developed by Indiana's Nutrient Stewardship Council. Each 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification lasts for three years.

Four retail locations throughout the state participated in the pilot audit and are the first locations in Indiana to become 4R certified:

- Crop Fertility Specialists in Rossville, Ind.
- Helena in Berne, Ind.
- The Andersons in Waterloo, Ind.
- White River Coop in Mitchell, Ind.

[Learn more about Indiana's 4R program](#)

Tennessee Nutrient Task Force Engages with Stakeholders and Partners

The Tennessee Nutrient Reduction Task Force is comprised of stakeholders and partners—including state agencies, local government agencies, universities, and nonprofit organizations—working to maintain and improve nutrient management in the state. The Task Force continues to develop the state's framework for nutrient reduction by furthering its knowledge of underlying science, strategies implemented by other states, and external resources that are available. During the past two quarters, the Tennessee Task Force held virtual sessions regarding nutrient management with USGS, Illinois EPA, and the Great Lakes to Gulf Virtual Observatory. The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation was awarded funds from EPA to support these efforts, including:

- Conducting trend analyses of nitrogen and phosphorus at nutrient-impaired streams;
- Developing multimedia approaches for reaching various stakeholder groups;
- Promoting soil health partnerships in Tennessee in order to reduce nutrient runoff; and
- Expanding wastewater plant optimization to additional facilities in Tennessee.

[Read more about the Tennessee Nutrient Reduction Task Force](#)

Federal Activities

Executive Order on Modernizing America's Water Resource Management and Water Infrastructure

On October 13, 2020, the White House issued an Executive Order formalizing the Water Subcabinet, consisting of representatives from the Department of the Interior (co-chair), the Environmental Protection Agency (co-chair), the Department of Agriculture, the Army, the Department of Energy, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Water Subcabinet will revamp coordination across the federal government and accelerate progress in improving water quality and modernizing the nation's water infrastructure. Enhanced coordination under the Water Subcabinet will streamline decision-making processes across federal agencies, thus reducing duplication to more efficiently ensure the reliability of U.S. water supplies, water quality, water systems, and water forecasting. This includes continuing to pursue innovative and collaborative efforts with HTF partners to leverage environmental markets and reduce excess nutrients in the Mississippi and Atchafalaya River Basin.

[Read more](#)

USDA Announces Updated Conservation Practice Standards

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has completed and published updates to its National Conservation Practice Standards, which include 58 standards that have been updated or revised since August 2020. The 2018 Farm Bill required NRCS to review all 169 of its National Conservation Practice Standards to seek opportunities to increase flexibility and incorporate new technologies.

[Read more](#)

USDA Looks to Conservation Finance to Deliver More Working Lands Conservation

Funded through the USDA NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program, CIG partners the Environmental Defense Fund and Climate and Forest Capital, released a new report entitled *Catalytic Capital and Agriculture: Opportunities to Invest in Healthy Soils, Resilient Farms and a Stable Climate*. The report highlights innovative ways that early investments in conservation finance projects can help jumpstart sustainable agricultural practices across the country, creating the necessary conditions for environmental markets to emerge and become self-sustaining. The publication lays out a strategy for how early funding can catalyze impact-driven investment that would not have happened without the intervention of this "catalytic" capital. The report emphasizes

that while America's farmers and ranchers are successfully feeding the world, the agricultural sector can also help solve some of the Nation's most challenging environmental problems.

[Read more](#)

Preliminary USDA Project Results Point to Success with Early Cover Crop Interseeding

Cover crops are a proven conservation practice in the Midwest with the potential to reduce excess nutrient runoff while providing soil health benefits. First-year results from a USDA-sponsored soil health demonstration project in northern Iowa demonstrate overwhelming success interseeding cover crops into a standing cash crop prior to harvest to allow the cover crops more time to become established. Plots with cover crops planted in June produced better yields, increased biomass, and more consistent soil temperatures. The study includes results from fifteen producers who worked with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to implement early interseeding of corn row plots.

[Read more](#)

USGS Identifies Illinois River Basin as part of Next Generation Water Observing System

The U.S. Geological Survey Water Resources Mission Area (WMA) is planning to intensively study ten Integrated Water Science (IWS) basins throughout the United States over the coming decade. The Illinois River Basin has been selected for integrating monitoring, research, modeling, and assessment to improve understanding of water availability in a wide range of environmental, hydrologic, and landscape settings. As each IWS basin will be representative of a larger region, the selection of the Illinois River is an important step toward understanding the Mississippi River Basin as a whole. High-density monitoring and cutting-edge research will be applied in the Illinois River Basin to better understand and model factors affecting water availability (quantity, quality, and use). IWS activities will be accomplished primarily through three WMA programs—the [Next Generation Water Observing System \(NGWOS\)](#) program, the [Integrated Water Availability Assessments \(IWAAs\)](#) program, and the Integrated Water Prediction (IWP) program. The three primary programs will be supported by up to eleven other WMA programs that will provide additional monitoring, research, and information dissemination support on an as-needed basis, driven by the issues in each IWS basin.

[Read more](#)

EPA Issues Rivers and Streams Assessment, Seeks Comment on Modernizing Survey Methods

EPA announced the availability of a final report—National Rivers and Streams Assessment (NRSA) 2013-2014: A Collaborative Survey—that provides a historical snapshot of water quality in U.S. rivers and streams. The agency is seeking input on all aspects of the design and implementation of the National Aquatic Resource Survey (NARS) program to improve future assessments.

[Read more](#)

Resources

How's My Waterway Tool Provides Water Quality Information Nationwide

[How's My Waterway](#) is an EPA-developed web application that provides the public with a comprehensive picture of water quality in their community and at state and national levels. The application integrates data from multiple data systems and was built with an interface that is easy to access and understand on a mobile phone or laptop computer. A short video tutorial is available [here](#).

[Read more](#)

Compendium of Conservation Tracking Tools Released

In November, the Hypoxia Task Force published a compilation of several technologies that are available to characterize crop areas, cover crops, riparian vegetation, and pasture-based practices for overall conservation system assessment and tracking. These technologies (some of which are free and publicly available, some commercial, and some available on a state-specific basis) can be used to document agricultural conservation across a wide range of areas, providing one way to track interim progress in implementation while waiting for longer-term water quality results. The compendium includes a brief introduction, a simple table summarizing the tools, as well as a one-page summary of each technology.

[Access here](#)

American Farmland Trust Publishes a Guide to Outcome Estimation Tools

Advancing the adoption of conservation practices and keeping farming operations viable are fundamental goals of the farm conservation community. American Farmland Trust recently published a guide to provide quantitative estimates of outcomes associated with farm conservation practices. Conservation practices can result in improved soil health, better water quality, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, a boost to the farmer's bottom line, and other benefits. Quantifying these outcomes is

important to help the local conservation community promote the deployment of conservation practices by producers faster and across more acres. The American Farmland Trust's guide identifies, describes, and compares readily available outcomes quantification tools and methods to educate conservationists and empower project managers to select one or more tools/methods to meet their project goals for quantifying outcomes.

[Access the guide here](#)

America's Watershed Initiative Release 2020 Mississippi River Watershed Report Card

America's Watershed Initiative, a collaborative organization working with hundreds of business, government, academic, and civic organizations, has published its second report card for the Mississippi River Watershed. The 2020 Mississippi River Watershed Report Card describes progress toward achieving the water quality, water quantity, recreation, transportation and other goals. The 2020 report card highlights some of the important work that partners across the watershed are doing to make positive change, and documents the work and investment that is still needed.

[Learn 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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If you have content to submit for the next newsletter, please email braschayko.kelley@epa.gov

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