



Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Task Force Newsletter

January 2020 | Issue 2

HTF HIGHLIGHTS

STATE ACTIVITIES

FEDERAL ACTIVITIES

RESOURCES

Hypoxia Task Force Upcoming Highlights

Don't miss the next Hypoxia Task Force Public Meeting!

The Hypoxia Task Force will host a public meeting with a live webcast and a networking session in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday, February 4, 2020. Register [here](#) to attend in person or by webcast. Please see [agendas and related materials from past HTF meetings](#), including the May 2019 Public Meeting in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

State Activities

Illinois Second Nutrient Reduction Strategy Biennial Report Released

In November 2019, the Illinois Department of Agriculture and Illinois Environmental Protection Agency announced the release of the state's second Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy Biennial Report. This document describes the continued progress being made in Illinois to reduce nutrient losses from multiple sources to improve water quality in Illinois waterways, as well as in downstream waters.

Illinois' Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy sets a long-term goal of reducing total phosphorus and total nitrogen loads by 45 percent, with interim reduction goals of 15 percent nitrate-nitrogen and 25 percent total phosphorus by 2025.

Strategy partners met in early December to review the report and make plans for 2020 implementation and beyond. In a recent interview with *Brownfield Ag News*, Director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture John Sullivan said the state and its partners in the agriculture sector have made good headway, especially in the area of cover crops, "but there is still a lot of work to do to reduce nutrient loss."

[Listen to the story](#)

[Read more](#)

Louisiana's Nutrient Reduction and Management Strategy Released

In December 2019, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality released its *2019 Nutrient Reduction and Management Strategy: Protection, Improvement and Restoration of Water Quality in Louisiana's Water Bodies*. This document represents both the 5-year review and the 2018 Annual Report.

This [strategy document](#) was developed by Louisiana's Interagency Nutrient Strategy Team comprised of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, and the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources. The team's strategy for nutrient management takes into account nonpoint and point sources and includes agricultural management practices, wastewater treatment technologies, coastal programs, and restoration activities to manage nutrient levels while meeting Clean Water Act regulatory requirements. The strategy also focuses on developing incentive-based approaches for participation of all stakeholders within the watershed community.

[Read more](#)

H2Ohio Water Quality Plan Released

In November 2019, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine unveiled "[H2Ohio](#)," a comprehensive, data-driven water quality plan to help:

- reduce phosphorus runoff and prevent algal blooms through increased implementation of agricultural best practices and the creation of wetlands;
- improve wastewater infrastructure;
- replace failing home septic systems; and
- prevent lead contamination in high-risk daycare centers and schools.

The Ohio General Assembly invested \$172 million in the plan in July 2019. Since then, Ohio's water quality and conservation experts have been developing strategies for long-term, cost-effective, and permanent water quality solutions. Progress will be regularly assessed and aggregate data will be made available to the public.

The plan was developed with input from a broad coalition of agriculture, education, research, conservation, and environmental partners. H2Ohio will be led by the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and Lake Erie Commission with support from the Ohio Agricultural Conservation Initiative, Ohio Farm Bureau, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and others.

[Read more](#)

Meet the Lower Mississippi River Sub-Basin Committee

Did you know? The Lower Mississippi River Sub-Basin Committee is a group that formed under the 2001 Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan, and includes the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee as members, along with participation by federal partner agencies, research institutions, and interested stakeholders. The committee aids state Nutrient Reduction Strategies and shares information across partners regarding the work of the Hypoxia Task Force.

[Read about the group's recent events and activities](#)

Federal Activities

Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley Restoration Fund

The Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley Restoration Fund plans to award approximately \$4 million in grants to restore, enhance, and maintain bottomland hardwood forests and wetlands and promote aquatic connectivity on private and public lands to improve wildlife habitat and water quality.

Major funding is provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, International Paper's Forestland Stewards partnership, the Walton Family Foundation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

[Read more](#)

EPA Awards \$4 Million to Protect America's Estuaries and Coastal Waters

On December 4, EPA announced a \$4 million cooperative agreement with Restore America's Estuaries to help fund projects supporting National Estuary Program coastal watersheds and estuaries. Restore America's Estuaries will operate a competition that provides entities from across the country an opportunity to apply for funding for projects that will improve the health of the nation's waters.

Projects will include those that apply new or innovative approaches and technologies to treat, remove, or prevent pollution before it enters estuaries; build on and implement existing nutrient management strategies; build local capacity to protect and restore coastal watersheds; and prevent trash from entering or removing trash that has entered coastal waters. Restore America's Estuaries will fund awards between \$75,000 and \$250,000.

[Read more](#)

Comment Period Open for Draft Technical Support Document: Implementing the 2019 Recommended Recreational Water Quality Criteria or Swimming Advisories for Microcystins and Cylindrospermopsin

On December 16, EPA released a draft technical support document that answers questions about how interested states and authorized tribes may adopt and implement EPA's June 2019 criteria recommendations in waterbody assessment and listing programs, as well as how information in the criteria document may be applied to swimming advisory programs.

This draft document supports EPA's final recommended recreational ambient water quality criteria or swimming advisories for two cyanotoxins, microcystins and cylindrospermopsin. The recommendations are intended as guidance to states, territories, and authorized tribes to consider when developing water quality standards or swimming advisories for these cyanotoxins in recreational waters.

EPA is taking public comment on this draft technical support document through February 14, 2020. [Read more](#)

Resources

New Floodplain Prioritization Tool

The Nature Conservancy has developed a new Floodplain Prioritization Tool (FP Tool) to identify critical opportunities for floodplain conservation and restoration in the Mississippi River Basin. The first-of-its-kind interactive, web-based tool is designed to help decision-makers—such as federal, state, and local governments, county planners, land trusts, and businesses—optimize their conservation and restoration investments and minimize the impacts of development.

The FP Tool allows stakeholders to identify priorities throughout the basin and assess information related to nutrient removal, wildlife habitat, flooding, and other goals.

The FP Tool is helping inform the development of a collaborative floodplain management plan for Missouri's Lower Meramec River that is being guided by an integrated, multi-disciplinary planning process through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' [Silver Jackets](#) program. Here, the partners have created a pilot, localized version of the FP Tool that demonstrates the potential to adapt the basin-scale version to local partnerships and local floodplain management projects.

Partners that contributed data used in the basin-wide version of the FP Tool include: University of Bristol, UK; Fathom; University of Iowa; U.S. Geological Survey; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; National Fish Habitat Partnership; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; American Bird Conservancy; Natural Resources Conservation Service; and USA National Phenology Network.

[Access the tool](#)

Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research Awards \$10.3 Million to Support Ecosystem Services Markets for Farmers and Ranchers

In November 2019, the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR) awarded \$10.3 million to establish the research component of the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC) to support the development of a national environmental credit marketplace. ESMC and its members will match the grant over three years to fund research and development projects in this public-private partnership for a total investment of \$20.6 million.

[Read more](#)

ICYMI: Second Report on Point Source Progress in Hypoxia Task Force States

The Hypoxia Task Force published its second Point Source Progress Report in October 2019. The report documents progress made by HTF states in adopting nutrient monitoring and discharge limits and progress in reducing point source discharges from major sewage treatment plants since the first report in 2016. The 2019 report also contains a newly completed analysis of nitrogen and phosphorus loads from all major sewage treatment plants in the 12 HTF states discharging to the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River Basin (MARB).

Some notable findings in the Report:

- Across all 12 HTF states, 70 percent of permits for major sewage treatment plants discharging to the MARB included monitoring requirements for both nitrogen and phosphorus, an increase from 56 percent from the 2016 report. Eighty-six percent of the permits for major sewage treatment plants included monitoring requirements for at least one nitrogen or phosphorus parameter, an increase from 71 percent from the 2016 report.
- Thirty-two percent of the permits for major sewage treatment plants in HTF states that discharge to the MARB have effluent/discharge limits for nitrogen or phosphorus, an increase from 27 percent from the 2016 report. Most of those permits have phosphorus limits.

[View the report](#)

Visit the EPA Hypoxia Task Force Website

Interested in learning more about the work of the Hypoxia Task Force? Our website features recent reports and measurements, important documents, upcoming actions, and learning opportunities. The “In the Spotlight” section of the homepage is a great place to start.

[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 highlights current information about the task force, providing 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 mayer.lauren@epa.gov

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