



April 2020 | Issue 3

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## Hypoxia Task Force Highlights

### Hypoxia Task Force Public Meeting

The Hypoxia Task Force hosted a public meeting with a live webcast and a networking session in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday, February 4, 2020. More than 80 participants attended in person and more than 140 participants viewed the webcast.

Each of the 12 member states presented on one topic from their nutrient reduction strategies and federal partners provided updates on varied programs and HTF workgroup advancements.

Check out the presentations and stay tuned for future collaborative opportunities. Meeting materials are available [here](#).

## State Activities

### Dubuque, Iowa Landmark Watershed Partners Agreement

On April 6, the Dubuque City Council approved an agreement between the City of Dubuque and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to allow Dubuque to meet water quality requirements by working with farmers located within the Apple-Plum, Grant-Little Maquoketa, and Maquoketa River watersheds. This agreement, which establishes the first use of Iowa’s Nutrient Reduction Exchange, provides a pathway for municipalities to address water quality requirements by working with farmers to implement farm conservation practices to reduce erosion and farm nutrient runoff. This cost-effective approach to financing farm conservation work offers another way to address water quality beyond expensive upgrades to municipal wastewater treatment plants.

[Read more](#)

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### Missouri Septic Tank Grant/Loan Program

Ozarks Water Watch, supported by the Department of Natural Resources State Revolving Fund, developed a model program and provided up to \$30,000 in grant and loan assistance to help

repair and replace failing septic tanks. With more people than ever living outside the range of municipal sewer systems in Southwest Missouri, septic systems have taken on a large role in wastewater treatment. When not maintained, these systems can leach contaminants into the water.

[Read more](#)

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## **Upper Mississippi River Basin Association Joins the Hypoxia Task Force Coordinating Committee**

In March, the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA) accepted an invitation from the Hypoxia Task Force Co-Chairs to join the Coordinating Committee (CC) to complement participation by the multi-state Ohio River Water Sanitation Committee and the Lower Mississippi River Sub-Basin Committee. In her letter accepting the Co-Chairs' invitation, UMRBA Executive Director Kirsten Wallace stated, "We are eager to work with you and the other Committee members to develop robust, cost-effective solutions for nutrient reduction throughout the Mississippi River watershed and the Gulf of Mexico."

UMRBA is a regional interstate organization formed by the Governors of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin to coordinate the states' river-related programs and policies and work with federal agencies that have river responsibilities.

[Read more](#)

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## **SERA-46 Farmer Leadership Summit**

In February, farmers and farm advisors from across the Mississippi River Basin convened near Memphis, TN for the first of two Farmer-to-Farmer Conservation Field Days that are part of an EPA-supported, multi-state project to facilitate peer learning among farmers about conservation. The event was multi-state, as an Arkansas farmer and a Mississippi farmer hosted attendees at their farms to share what they have learned about how to make conservation practical and profitable. Peer-to-peer learning is an effective and preferred way for farmers to learn new practices.

"This event gave farmers from across the basin a chance to interact with farmers managing land down river. Attendees heard from farmer hosts about benefits and challenges of conservation practices and engaged in conversations of how farmers can be effective watershed leaders," said project member Amanda Gumbert, a water quality specialist at the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

The second Farmer-to-Farmer Conservation Field Day will be held in Wisconsin (date TBD).

[Read more](#)

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## Soil Health Case Studies from American Farmland Trust Highlight Farms in Illinois and Ohio

American Farmland Trust (AFT) has developed case studies documenting the water quality and farm income benefits of soil health practices including conservation tillage, cover crops, and nutrient management. AFT's recent additions, "Accelerating Soil Health" were presented at the HTF meeting in February in Washington, D.C. These case studies aim to assist farmers and technical service providers who want to help farmers adopt soil health practices.

[Read the case studies](#)

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## Wisconsin's Long-Term River Water Quality Trends Data Available

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has made water quality trends data and tools available to the public through a web-based app and a new report. Wisconsin's Long-term River Water Quality Trends network visualizes data through the app that summarizes water quality information for Wisconsin's major rivers, including the Upper Mississippi. Data and analyses are updated annually and water quality trends are analyzed using a statistical model called Weighted Regressions on Time, Discharge, and Season ([WRTDS](#)). The user-friendly app provides both statewide and site-specific trends in water quality. In November 2019, the state issued a report titled, "How's the River Doing? Mississippi River Clean Water Act Pilot Water Quality Summary for Minnesota-Wisconsin," which describes a first-ever pilot monitoring project to implement the Upper Mississippi River Clean Water Act Monitoring Strategy 2013-2022. The key findings in the report establish an important benchmark for pollution reduction efforts.

[View the app](#)

[Read the report](#)

## Federal Activities

### USDA Unveils Federal Rural Resource Guide to Help Rural Communities Address the COVID-19 Pandemic

On April 13, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a one-stop-shop of federal programs that can be used by rural communities, organizations, and individuals impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. [The COVID-19 Federal Rural Resource Guide](#) is a first-of-its-kind resource for rural leaders looking for federal funding and partnership opportunities to help address this pandemic.

USDA has taken many immediate actions to assist farmers, ranchers, producers, rural communities, and rural-based businesses and organizations impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information on these actions, visit [www.usda.gov/coronavirus](http://www.usda.gov/coronavirus).

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### EPA Announces Coronavirus Resources for State, Local, and Tribal Governments

On April 17, EPA updated its coronavirus website to include new resources for state, local, and tribal agencies and intergovernmental associations. [EPA's Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resources for](#)

[State, Local, and Tribal Agencies and Associations](#) contains information on grants, enforcement and compliance programs, water infrastructure, and a host of other issues important to effective environmental program delivery. These resources will help EPA and its partners continue to provide the environmental protection the nation depends on during the coronavirus public health emergency.

[Read more](#)

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## USDA to Invest \$56 Million in 2020 to Help Farmers Improve Water Quality

In early February following the Hypoxia Task Force meeting, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Matthew Lohr announced the USDA will make \$17.5 million available in 2020 to support conservation investments by agriculture producers through its Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative, and more than \$38 million to support producers in 300 small watersheds across the nation, including many watersheds in the Mississippi River Basin. EPA welcomes USDA's commitment to helping producers improve water quality, restore wetlands and enhance wildlife habitat, while ensuring the economic viability and productivity of agricultural lands.

[Read more](#)

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## EPA Awards \$1.2 Million to Hypoxia Task Force States

In February, EPA completed the awards totaling \$1.2 million to the 12 state members of the Hypoxia Task Force to help implement state plans to reduce excess nutrients in the Mississippi River/Atchafalaya River Basin. Through this funding, EPA is promoting tailored and effective nutrient reduction efforts that are developed through state leadership in coordination with EPA. The available funding was first announced last August in the [following press release](#).

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## NOAA Releases U.S. Spring Outlook

On March 19, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's [\(NOAA's\) Climate Prediction Center](#) announced its forecast of above-average temperatures across the country this spring, as well as above-average precipitation in the central and eastern United States. Significant rainfall events could trigger flood conditions on top of already saturated soils.

The prediction of another year of widespread river flooding is not expected to be as severe or prolonged overall as the historic floods in 2019. Major to moderate flooding is likely in 23 states from the Northern Plains south to the Gulf Coast, with the most significant flood potential in parts of North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota. The greatest risk for major and moderate flood conditions includes the upper and middle Mississippi River basins, the Missouri River basin and the Red River of the North. Moderate flooding is anticipated in the Ohio, Cumberland, Tennessee, and Missouri River basins, as well as the lower Mississippi River basin and its tributaries.

[Read more](#)

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## EPA Publishes Story Map Illustrating Progress and Continued Efforts to Protect America's Waters

On March 3, EPA Assistant Administrator for Water Dave Ross highlighted the agency's efforts to protect the nation's waters as part of EPA's [50th anniversary celebration](#). Throughout the month of February, EPA highlighted accomplishments and issued announcements that demonstrate the agency's continued commitment to drinking water and surface water protection. EPA also published a story map to illustrate progress and continued efforts to protect America's waters.

[Read more](#)

## Resources

### Farmer-Led Conservation and Watershed Protection Mini-Grant Program

To help kickstart or expand farmer-led conservation demonstration efforts, Mississippi State University is sponsoring a mini-grant program to support nongovernmental organizations, state or county government agencies, university extension professionals, and others who support farmers in one or more of the 12 SERA-46/Hypoxia Task Force states in the Mississippi River Basin: Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. Qualified organizations must partner with an existing farmer or farmer-led organization. Awards will be up to \$4,000 for one year. **Applications will be accepted through June 1, 2020.**

[Apply now](#)

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### Nutrient Runoff Network Bulletin

A new bulletin related to nutrient runoff issues and impacts throughout the Mississippi River Basin is now available. It's designed to create an opportunity for those focused on nutrient runoff to build connectivity and increase collaboration between organizations in the Gulf of Mexico, Mississippi River Basin, and Great Lakes watersheds.

This bi-monthly bulletin is produced by the NOAA Central Region and Gulf of Mexico Regional Collaboration members: Minnesota, Louisiana, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Programs, National Water Extension Program, Northern Gulf Institute, NOAA Center for Coastal Ocean Science, and NOAA's National Weather Service Forecast Offices and River Forecast Centers.

To sign-up or share information, send a message to [noaa.centralregion@noaa.gov](mailto:noaa.centralregion@noaa.gov).

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### 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](#)

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### 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.

The mention of trade names, products, or services does not convey and should not be interpreted as conveying official federal approval, endorsement, or recommendation for use.

If you have content to submit for the next newsletter, please email [mayer.lauren@epa.gov](mailto:mayer.lauren@epa.gov)

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