



October 2020 | Issue 5

HTF HIGHLIGHTS

Hypoxia Task Force Highlights

STATE ACTIVITIES

The Hypoxia Task Force hosted a Fall 2020 Virtual Public meeting, where members highlighted actions to reduce excess nutrients in the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River Basin. The state members shared success stories, lessons learned, and next steps in their efforts to reduce excess nutrients in surface water. Federal members discussed their funding support for state efforts, as well as the benefits of new tools and novel approaches to improve surface water quality in the basin. Together, state and federal actions continue to support communities in the American heartland by improving water quality upstream while helping address the Gulf of Mexico hypoxic zone downstream.

FEDERAL ACTIVITIES

[Read more](#)

RESOURCES

State Activities

HTF Releases a State Success Stories Story Map

From Minnesota and Wisconsin to Louisiana and Mississippi, HTF states have worked with federal agencies and partners on many successful projects and programs to reduce nutrient loads in order to improve water quality in the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River Basin (MARB) and reduce the size of the Gulf hypoxic zone. The initial release of the Success Stories Story Map has 28 stories from all 12 Hypoxia Task Force states, grouped in four categories: technology and practices to reduce nutrient pollution; strategies for success; monitoring and assessment; and funding and financing projects.

[Read more about state success stories here](#)

Minnesota Publishes its Nutrient Reduction Strategy 5-Year Progress Report

Minnesota recently completed a 5-year progress report on implementation of its Nutrient Reduction Strategy (NRS). The report evaluates progress related to 1) large-scale program advancements, 2) BMP adoption levels compared to interim goal needs, and 3) river nutrient concentration and load trends across the state.

[Read more](#)

Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council Supports the state Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy

At the Virtual Fall HTF Public Meeting, the Illinois Nutrient Research & Education Council (NREC) discussed funding research that supports the Illinois agricultural community to work together to meet the recommendations of the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS). NREC was created by state statute in 2012 and is funded by a 75-cent per ton assessment on bulk fertilizer sold in Illinois.

Since its inception, Illinois NREC has invested over \$26 million into nutrient related research efforts that has resulted in more than a dozen peer-reviewed papers published in professional journals and four publications, covering topics including turf management, cover crops, and nitrogen fertilizer rates. NREC also funds the bi-annual USDA-NASS survey that serves to measure farmer knowledge and adoption of conservation practices recommended by the NLRS.

Without this funding, the industry would be without critical research for maximizing the efficiency of agricultural nutrients while minimizing any possible negative impacts to the environment.

[Read more](#)

41st Ramsar Site – Lower Wisconsin Riverway Receives International Recognition

US and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands announced that the Lower Wisconsin Riverway has been declared a Wetland of International Importance, the 41st site in the US to receive this designation. A partnership has been working for more than six years to bring this to fruition. These wetlands provide critical benefits by accommodating floodwaters, stabilizing groundwater recharge, reducing erosion and soil loss, and improving water quality. The site includes land owned by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the US Bureau of Land Management, the Ho-Chunk Nation, and private landowners. The designation is entirely non-regulatory and does not supersede local ownership and management authority.

[Read more](#)

Federal Activities

State Opportunities to Purchase or Support Nutrient Credit Markets with EPA Funding Assistance

At the Fall 2020 Virtual Meeting, EPA provided information on opportunities for the Task Force states to use traditional EPA funding, (e.g., Clean Water Act Section 319 grants and State Revolving Funds) to support market-based programs that help further reduce excess nutrients in surface water, including the use of 319 funds to purchase verified water quality credits. This new guidance from the Office of Water has the potential to expand participation in water quality markets and drive further

surface water quality improvements in the Basin. EPA Assistant Administrator David Ross sent the agency's presentations to state and tribal environmental directors nationwide to ensure all interested states and tribes can benefit from these opportunities.

[Read More at HTF Meetings on the HTF Homepage](#)

USDA Announces 2021 Priority Watersheds for Water Quality

As part of the Fall 2020 Virtual Meeting, USDA announced that it has named 379 priority watersheds to help agricultural producers improve surface water quality across the country. Producers in these targeted watersheds will receive focused financial and technical resources through USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) successful landscape-level water-quality efforts—the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) and National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI).

[Read more](#)

States Continue to Implement their Nutrient Reduction Strategies with EPA Support

At the HTF Meeting, EPA announced that it is providing an additional \$360 thousand to the HTF states to support the implementation of state plans to reduce excess nutrients in surface water—bringing the total amount [announced over the last two years](#) to \$2.4 million. These funds are being used to implement state programs that are tailored to meet local needs while reducing excess nutrients delivered downstream.

Joint EPA-USDA Partnership and Competition on Next Gen Fertilizers to Advance Agricultural Sustainability in the United States

EPA and USDA, in collaboration with The Fertilizer Institute (TFI), the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA), have launched a competition that includes two challenges intended to accelerate the development and use of affordable existing and new technologies to reduce the environmental impacts of U.S. corn production. “Enhanced Efficiency Fertilizers” (EEF) refer to new formulations that control fertilizer release or alter reactions that reduce nutrient losses to the environment. EEFs and other next generation product technology innovations may be an important addition to a system of conservation practices that help reduce the impacts from row crop agriculture on the environment, while maintaining or increasing agricultural productivity and profitability.

[Read more](#)

Smaller-than-expected Gulf of Mexico ‘dead zone’ measured

NOAA-supported scientists have determined this year's Gulf of Mexico “dead zone”— an area of low to no oxygen that can kill fish and marine life — is approximately 2,116 square miles, or equivalent to 1.4 million acres. The measured size of the dead zone is the third smallest in the 34-year record of surveys. The average hypoxic zone over the past five years is 5,408-square miles, which is 2.8 times larger than the 2035 target set by the Hypoxia Task Force. Results were discussed at a joint media teleconference with participants from NOAA, the survey cruise, and the HTF. NOAA researchers noted that this year, Hurricane Hanna passed through the central and western Gulf days prior to the research cruise and mixed the water column, disrupting the hypoxic zone which forms in the coastal ocean west of the Mississippi River delta. While the size of the hypoxic zone fluctuates naturally throughout the summer, it usually forms again within days or weeks after the passage of storms.

[Read more](#)

Resources

What's in the water? New USGS website provides water quality information for U.S. streams and rivers

Interested in water-quality concentrations, loads, and trends in streams and rivers across the United States? Check out a new USGS website with data from the USGS National Water Quality Network—110 stream and river sites with long-term, consistent data on water-quality. Use the website to access annually updated information on nutrients, sediment, pesticides, and streamflow. These data are collected to assess the status and trends of water-quality conditions at large inland and coastal river sites as well as in small streams in urban, agricultural, and undeveloped basins.

[Read more](#)

New Tool Provides Scientific Data and Curated Insights on Conservation Farming Practices

Scientists from conservation and academic institutions have launched AgEvidence, a visualization dashboard of data from nearly 300 peer-reviewed research papers and curated expert insights derived from those studies. The research compiled in AgEvidence focuses on the environmental and agronomic impacts of cover crops, tillage management, pest management, and nutrient management practices used in growing corn and/or soybean crops in the Midwest.

AgEvidence was created as part of the Managing Soil Carbon working group of the Science for Nature and People Partnership (SNAPP). SNAPP is a partnership of The Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society and the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

[Check out AgEvidence](#)

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.

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 braschayko.kelley@epa.gov
