Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Task Force Newsletter

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Hypoxia Task Force Highlights

On July 10, the EPA released a second Implementation Memorandum with guidance for Hypoxia Task Force states as they develop their second and final round of cooperative agreements under the Gulf Hypoxia Program. This Implementation Memorandum is a supplement to the EPA's June 9, 2022, memorandum, *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law: Gulf Hypoxia Program FY 22 Guidance for State Cooperative Agreements.* The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law appropriates $60 million in total over five years in support of actions by the Task Force. In addition to funding for the Hypoxia Task Force states, the Gulf Hypoxia Program provides modest funding to HTF Tribes, Sub-Basin Committees and the Land Grant University Consortium, SERA-46, to advance the goals of the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan.

State Activities

Kentucky Nutrient Reduction Strategy Updates

As part of their Nutrient Reduction Strategy, the Kentucky Division of Water provides program updates, events and resources, research and news links, and project highlights in their Quarterly Nutrient Newsletter. In their second Quarter 2024 Nutrient Newsletter, the Kentucky Division of Water highlights various successes by nutrient workgroups throughout March 2024, including project planning, meeting with the new NRCS State Conservationist to discuss agricultural needs, and updating priorities for future Gulf Hypoxia Program funding. Other Nutrient Reduction Strategy updates include the USDA announcing $1.5 Billion in funding for the 2024 Regional Conservation Partnership Program, prompting the formation of an interstate group for individuals interested in collaborating in the Red River Basin; the Kentucky Division of Water updating the Erosion Prevention and Sediment Control manual into a digital resource on the Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet's website; the Kentucky Division of Water publishing a Package Plant Success in Kentucky Story Map highlighting environmental benefits from package plant removals since 2017 and more. Several events and resources are also available throughout 2024 for nutrient workgroups, with more information provided in the newsletter.

Read the Kentucky Nutrient Newsletter

Indiana Conservation Groups Again Have a Record Year for Conservation Practices

Indiana landowners, for the second year in a row, set a record in the number of conservation practices installed to maintain soil health, according to the Indiana Conservation Partnership. The Indiana Conservation Partnership, which works with Hoosier landowners to provide technical or financial assistance for the implementation of conservation projects, recently announced its most recent conservation accomplishments. In 2023, landowners supported by the Indiana Conservation Partnership installed more than 50,000 new conservation practices, up 3,000 from 2022. The report showed that over the last year, landowners helped prevent over 1.6 million tons of sediment, over 3.6 million pounds of nitrogen, and over 1.8 million pounds of phosphorus from entering Indiana waterways.

Read the Press Release

Illinois' Efforts to Improve Water Quality is Detailed in the 2023 Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy Biennial Report

Illinois' ongoing commitment to water quality is demonstrated in the 2023 Biennial Report of the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. The report has been developed by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Department of Agriculture and University of Illinois Extension.

The 2023 Biennial Report is the fourth update to the strategy since its inception in 2015. Implementation of the strategy is guided by research to optimize nutrient loss reduction while fostering deep collaboration and innovation across academia; the private sector; non-profits; wastewater agencies; and local, state and federal government agencies. The report details the progress of the State's efforts to improve water quality by reducing nutrient pollution, which affects both local waterways and the Gulf of Mexico. It outlines initiatives in 2021–22 that reduced nutrient loss across the agricultural, wastewater, and urban stormwater sectors and stresses the multifaceted challenges to addressing nutrient loss.

Read the Press Release and the Report

Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council's 2023 Report on Innovative Crop-Production & Nutrient Loss Minimization

Since 2012, the Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council, or NREC, has highlighted research on optimizing crop-production and minimizing nutrient loss to the environment, aiming to meet the goals of the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. In June 2024, NREC published their 2023 annual report, which compiles new and ongoing research projects that are considered innovative and easy-to-implement for stakeholders, particularly farmers and crop advisors. The annual report also identifies innovative nutrient management techniques, return-on-investment solutions, crop-yield improvements, and methods for reducing nutrient loss, each highlighted in various project reports submitted by funded researchers over the past year. In 2023, NREC participated in a 4R field day to present research on cover crop varieties and seeding cover crops to farmers throughout Central Illinois. They also hosted the Investment Insight LIVE, engaging 100

stakeholders with information from various research projects and results and continued to identify issues most relevant to farmers and crop advisers in Illinois.

Read the Report

Illinois Sustainable Ag Partnership's 2023 Progress for Soil Health and Nutrient Loss Goals

The Illinois Sustainable Ag Partnership works with member organizations to support Illinois agriculture in expanding and developing new programs related to soil health and nutrient loss goals. The Partnership's primary effort is meeting targets of the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. The Partnership's 2023 Annual Report covers progress and updates within its program pillars over the past year, which include production risk management, soil health and in-field management, water quality and edge-of-field practices, and network of practitioners. In 2023, the Partnership became an official 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, while continuing to prioritize the development of resources to support healthy soil, clean water, and profitable farms. Several highlights described in the annual report include publishing an Overview of Carbon Markets resource; developing An Introduction to Soil Health Practices resource for Illinois farmers; engaging audiences at field days with the Rainfall Simulator; hosting a statewide cover crop peer network; and graduating another class from the Partnership's Advanced Soil Health Training.

Read the Report

Federal Activities

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration forecasts above-average summer 'dead zone' in Gulf of Mexico

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is forecasting an above-average summer "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico covering approximately 5,827 square miles. The dead zone, or hypoxic area, is an area of low oxygen that can kill fish and other marine life and it occurs every summer and is primarily a result of excess nutrient pollution from human activities in cities and farm areas throughout the Mississippi and Atchafalaya watershed. The U.S. Geological Survey provides Mississippi and Atchafalaya River discharge and nutrient loading data for the month of May, which are key factors used by NOAA forecast models to estimate the size of the Gulf's dead zone during the summer. In May 2024, discharge in the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers was about 5% above the long-term average between 1980 and 2023, while the nitrate loads were about 7% below and phosphorus loads were about 22% above the long-term averages.

This annual forecast is a key metric that informs the collective efforts of the Hypoxia Task Force to inform nutrient reduction targets across the Mississippi watershed states.

Read the Press Release

EPA releases the Expert Query Tool and Provides Access to State and Tribal Data

In January 2024 EPA released the Expert Query tool, which empowers users to access surface water quality data from the Assessment and TMDL Tracking and Implementation System, or ATTAINS, encompassing Assessment decisions (under Clean Water Act Sections 303(d), 305(b), and 106) and action data like Total Maximum Daily Loads, Advance Restoration Plans and Protection Approaches.

The tool supports querying and downloading data within and across organizations (states or Tribes), such as querying all the data within an EPA region or all nutrient Total Maximum Daily Loads nationally. It also allows users to download national ATTAINS data extracts in various formats, such as Excel files or CSV files.

Launch the Expert Query

EPA HABs, Hypoxia, and Nutrients Research Webinar Series – Climate Change: Nutrient & Sediment Impacts

The EPA's Office of Research and Development, Office of Water and regional offices host a free webinar series focused on communicating the latest, cutting-edge research related to nutrients and the priority impacts of nutrient pollution including harmful algal blooms, or HABs, and hypoxia. Topics include regulatory updates and cutting-edge EPA research related to monitoring and forecasting, prevention, control and response. Webinars are typically held bimonthly from 2 to 3 p.m. ET on the last Wednesday of the month. The next webinar will be held Wednesday July 31 at 2pm ET by zoom; register for the webinar here.

Learn more about the Webinar Series

Resources

Illinois-based STAR Framework Illuminating Pathway to Sustained Agricultural Conservation with National Tool

Saving Tomorrow's Agricultural Resources, or STAR, started as a grassroots movement in 2017, when two Illinois farmers teamed with Champaign County Soil, Water Conservation District, and other partners to design a simple, straightforward, and easily usable tool to track agricultural conservation progress and meaningfully address local resource concerns. As of September 2023, STAR is a national nonprofit organization that collaborates with state partners and tailors the STAR framework to connect producers with tools, resources and reward programs to grow conservation across all types of agriculture. The 2023 Annual Report highlights progress made in the past year, including web tool design and development, the STAR website launch, and communications development with Signal Group.

Read the Report

NOAA's Mississippi River Basin/Gulf of Mexico Nutrient Runoff Network July 2024 Info Bulletin

The Mississippi River Basin/Gulf of Mexico Nutrient Runoff Network published a July 2024 Bulletin, designed to share information with those interested in a range of nutrient runoff issues and impacts. This bulletin highlights the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association's "Multi-Benefit Conservation Practice Workshop" from October 2023, meant to discuss ways to increase implementation of multi-benefit conservation practices among various organizations and sectors. The bulletin also shares various nutrient runoff news, outlooks and forecasts, funding opportunities, jobs, fellowships, graduate assistantships and upcoming meetings and events.

To join the distribution list and/or include information in the next bulletin, email noaa.centralregion@noaa.gov.

Access the Bulletin Here

Mississippi River Basin Ag & Water Desk Publishes News Articles on the Nutrients and the 'Dead Zone'

Recently, the Mississippi River Basin Ag & Water Desk, an independent journalism collaborative based at the University of Missouri in partnership with Report for America, published a series of news articles regarding actions to reduce farm runoff to the Mississippi and Atchafalaya River Basin. Members of the Hypoxia Task Force and EPA Administrator Michael Regan were interviewed over the last year and the articles explore the impact of basin-wide actions and the challenges to reach the Task Force's goals.

The Task Force's 2023 Report to Congress also shares actions of the Task Force and presents the state-of-the-art science of nutrients in the basin, some of which is referenced in the news articles.

An additional recent news article was published by both the Louisville Courier Journal and Mississippi River Basin Ag & Water Desk to provide an agency perspective on nutrient reduction efforts through the lens of Kentucky. Additional Task Force members also provided perspectives in this article.

Read the News Articles

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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