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Welcome Message from Hypoxia Task Force Co-Chairs

Welcome to the first issue of the Hypoxia Task Force (HTF) Newsletter! This newsletter is intended to better inform interested parties of the work being done to reduce the hypoxic zone in the northern Gulf of Mexico and improve water quality throughout the Mississippi River/Atchafalaya River Basin.

Each newsletter issue will highlight state and federal activities, upcoming events, resources, and more to help support nutrient reduction initiatives.

The HTF is a model for federal-state cooperation on one of the most challenging water quality issues facing our country—the impacts of nutrients lost into our nation’s waters. Going forward, we will use this newsletter to amplify success, innovation, opportunities, and challenges we face as states implement their Nutrient Reduction Strategies with strong federal support.

EPA, on behalf of the HTF, will work collaboratively with members to publish this newsletter.

Thank you,

Dave Ross
Assistant Administrator, Office of Water
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Federal Co-Chair, Hypoxia Task Force

Mike Naig
Secretary, Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship
State Co-Chair, Hypoxia Task Force

Hypoxia Task Force Meeting Accomplishments and Next Steps

The [HTF met](#) on May 15-16, 2019 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana to discuss how the partnership collaborates to track progress, share best practices in implementing nutrient reduction strategies, and engage with partners, stakeholders, and the public.

Tracking progress requires multiple tools and measurements to capture the varied factors that influence the landscape and Gulf. HTF and partners measure basin-wide water quality and nutrient reduction at multiple scales through monitoring, trend analyses, nonpoint and point source metric tracking, and

annual hypoxic zone model forecasts and measurement. The HTF also issues periodic progress reports on metrics. View the [2017 Report to Congress](#) on metrics and progress.

The HTF is committed to sharing information on successes, challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned. Engaging with partners and the public is vital to catalyzing new approaches to tackle the scale of nutrient reductions needed to meet the HTF goal of reducing the hypoxic zone. Networking opportunities for partners, public engagement through annual meetings and state website updates, and presentations at conferences are all best practices in which we are committed to better communicate our progress.

Overall, work continues towards implementing the HTF [2008 Action Plan](#). The HTF is committed to its work and expanding engagement with the public to communicate the progress being made to reduce excess nutrient loads to the Gulf and improve local water quality throughout the Basin.

State Activities

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Kentucky Agriculture Water Quality Act

“The Kentucky Agriculture Water Quality Act has been a successful tool in the protection of water quality across the state.

- Charles G. Snavelly

Marking the 25th anniversary of the state's Agricultural Water Quality Act, Kentucky Secretary of Agriculture Charles G. Snavelly wrote an article that appeared in the September 2019 Kentucky Farm Bureau News Magazine. In this article, the

Secretary discusses the challenges with nutrients and the hypoxia issues in the Gulf of Mexico, Kentucky's nutrient reduction efforts, and the importance of farmers implementing agriculture water quality plans to reduce soil erosion and improve water quality.

[Read the article](#) **EXIT**

Crop Insurance Discount for Iowa Farmers Who Plant Cover Crops

On September 30, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) announced that farmers planting cover crops this fall may be eligible for a \$5 per acre reduction on their spring 2020 crop insurance premiums. Cover crops can help prevent erosion and improve water quality and soil health; cover crops reduce nitrogen loads by 28-31 percent and phosphorous loads by 29 percent.

This is a joint three-year demonstration project administered by IDALS and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency. Applications will be accepted through January 15, 2020 or as funding is available.

“All Iowans have a role to play in improving water quality in our state and downstream. Cover crops are proven to reduce nutrient loads and improve soil health. As part of [Iowa's] Nutrient Reduction Strategy, our goal is to have at least 14 million acres of cover crops planted in the state of Iowa. This program represents just one of many funding sources available to help farmers add conservation practices to their fields.” ~Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig

[Read more](#) **EXIT**

Federal Activities

EPA Seeks Comment on New Policy Proposals to Facilitate Market-Based Opportunities to Improve Water Quality

On September 5, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler announced an important step to help promote the use of market-based approaches to efficiently and cost-effectively improve water quality across the nation. Speaking at the Chesapeake Bay Executive Council meeting, Administrator Wheeler announced new policy proposals that could simplify and give more flexibility to states, tribes, and stakeholders seeking to develop market-based programs or to generate or use nutrient reduction credits.

EPA published the [Federal Register](#) notice titled, “Water Quality Trading Under The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Program” on September 19, 2019.

- EPA welcomes comments, which must be received on or before November 18, 2019.
- A combined in-person and online listening session will be held at EPA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. on October 21, 2019, from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. EDT.

“EPA is proposing updates to our water quality trading policy that would help state and local partners take advantage of new technologies or develop market-based programs for improving water quality. Building on efforts already underway at the state, local, and tribal level, EPA is helping facilitate the use of innovative tools and technologies that will deliver critical water quality improvements at a lower cost.” ~EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler

[Read more](#)

EPA Provides \$1.2 Million to Hypoxia Task Force States

On August 22, EPA announced that it is providing a total of \$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.

[Read more](#)

EPA Announces More Than \$7.5 Million in Water Quality Cooperative Agreements Through Gulf of Mexico Division

On August 14, EPA announced that it anticipates awarding more than \$7.5 million in Farmer to Farmer Cooperative Agreements to fund projects that improve water quality, habitat, and environmental education in the Gulf of Mexico watershed.



EPA’s Gulf of Mexico Program initiative promotes innovative, market-based solutions for monitoring and improving water quality while also maintaining a vital agricultural economy.

The seven recipients are:

- B.F. Smith Foundation – \$1,149,813 (Mississippi)
- Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship – \$1,150,000 (Iowa)
- Mississippi State University – \$1,088,025 (Mississippi)
- Practical Farmers of Iowa – \$935,788 (Iowa)
- Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies – \$1,000,000 (Florida)
- University of Iowa – \$1,064,926 (Iowa)
- Winrock International – \$1,150,000 (Arkansas)

Since 2018, approximately \$9.5 million has been awarded through EPA’s Farmer to Farmer

Cooperative Agreements.

“These grants are an important part of our efforts to support America’s farmers in a manner that strengthens both American agriculture and the protection of our nation’s vital water resources.”

~EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler

Read the [press release](#) and learn more about the Gulf of Mexico Program [here](#)

EPA and Federal Partners Announce Winners of Water Quality “Challenge”

On August 21, EPA along with four federal partners announced the winners of a technology-accelerating water quality challenge. This year’s winners demonstrated how data from low cost water quality monitoring sensors can be used to inform local-scale nutrient management decisions.

[Read more](#)



USDA Awards \$48 Million Public-Private Investment to Improve Critical Wetlands

On September 13, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced an investment of \$48 million in wetland conservation projects in eight HTF states through its Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP), implemented through USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. WREP project partners are providing nearly \$2.3 million in matching funds, bringing the total investment to more than \$50 million.

[Read more](#)



Five-Star Urban Grants Award \$1.7 Million to Help Restore Urban Waters and Streams

On August 28, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), with support from EPA, announced grants totaling \$1.7 million under NFWF’s Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program. The grants support public-private partnerships that help restore wildlife habitat and urban waters across the country.

[Read more](#)

Resources

Hypoxia Task Force Point Source Progress Report

The HTF published its second Point Source Progress Report in early October. 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 Task Force released its first Point Source Progress Report in 2016. The report also contains a newly completed analysis of nitrogen and phosphorus loads from all major sewage treatment plants in the 12 Hypoxia Task Force states discharging to the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River Basin (MARB). In addition, many states provided supplemental information on their programs for reducing nutrient loads from point sources.

Innovative Financing Strategies for Reducing Nutrients: Webinar Series and Workshop

EPA and USDA co-hosted a four-part webinar series this summer on innovative financing mechanisms in both the public and private sectors that can be used to help reduce excess nutrients in our nation's waters. The webinar series featured case studies of successful approaches from across the country. The series culminated in the National Nutrient Finance Forum on August 14 in Washington, D.C. to further explore the topic and encourage creative problem solving. More than 65 participants discussed challenges, creative mechanisms for financing projects, and what needs to be done to replicate out-of-the box approaches.

Sample of Findings – Opportunities for Success:

- **Enabling a Policy Environment** that creates a need for nutrient exchange is a key element of success.
- **Quantifying through Measurement and Verification** using reliable data to quantify the commodity are key.
- **Establishing Procedural Clarity** and related governance/institutional frameworks will help enable markets to succeed; market players will feel more confident in how to participate.
- **Bridging the Gap between Agricultural and Municipal Communities** can help create a watershed-level approach to planning nutrient reductions.
- **Bundling Multi-Benefits as Ecosystem Services** in the marketplace could be instrumental in helping markets be successful.

[View the webinar series](#)

[Check out future workshop opportunities](#)

State Nutrient Reduction Strategies

State development and implementation of nutrient reduction strategies are a major focus of the Hypoxia Task Force. States continue to implement state nutrient reduction strategies that contain tailored methods for reducing nutrients in their state. Learn more about each state strategy [here](#).

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.

If you have content to submit for the next newsletter, please email mayer.lauren@epa.gov
