

NEWS RELEASE



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State Seeks Public Input on Strategy to Reduce Phosphorous and Nitrogen Pollution in Mississippi River Basin

Draft Strategy Aims to Have Agricultural and Municipal Interests Work Together to Improve Water Quality

SPRINGFIELD – Illinois EPA Director Lisa Bonnett and Illinois Department of Agriculture Director Robert Flider today announced that the public is invited to provide comments on a new statewide effort designed to improve water quality in Illinois and the Gulf of Mexico. The public comment period for the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy is now open, and comments must be postmarked by midnight on January 24, 2015.

The Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy relies on the latest science and best available technologies to guide statewide efforts to reduce phosphorus and nitrogen losses that end up in Illinois waterways and the Gulf of Mexico. These nutrients spur algae blooms that deplete oxygen levels, hinder recreation, and threaten public health. Nutrient pollution can also degrade drinking water quality and require cities to install costly treatment equipment.

“The Illinois EPA recognizes the work farmers and municipalities have done and continue to do to protect the environment, and we want to build on that good work,” Illinois EPA Director Lisa Bonnett said. “We thank the members of the Policy Working Group for the hard work and expertise they brought to this process and look forward to public participation as we move toward a final strategy.”

“Illinois agriculture has a long history of responding positively to environmental issues,” Illinois Agriculture Director Bob Flider said. “Programs like *T by 2000* in the 1980s and 90s and, more recently, *Keep it for the Crop* have enabled farmers to sustain their industry-leading agricultural production while protecting the state’s valuable soil and water resources. This strategy builds upon these proven programs. It contains sound, incentive-driven approaches to keep more nutrients in farm fields and reduce run-off into streams and rivers.”

The strategy outlines practices to reduce nutrient losses from point sources such as wastewater treatment plants and industrial facilities, and non-point sources, including runoff from farm fields and city streets. It uses scientific assessments to target the most critical watersheds and to build upon existing state and industry programs. The goal is to reduce the amount of total phosphorus and nitrate-nitrogen reaching Illinois waters by 45 percent. Recommendations include establishing committees to coordinate water quality monitoring, developing specific measuring criteria, improving urban stormwater programs and education, improving agriculture stakeholder and agency collaboration, and defining a regular review and revision process.

“The Illinois Farm Bureau appreciates the IEPA and IDOA’s lead - and all of the stakeholders’ involvement - in developing the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy,” said Lauren Lurkins, Director of Natural and Environmental Resources. “Further, we appreciate that education, outreach and voluntary incentive-based practices will continue to be the primary tools for addressing the agricultural components of the NLRS. This approach will lend itself to more widespread adoption of necessary best management practices to address this complicated issue. Illinois farmers are committed to continued use of best management practices, as they care deeply about the quality of the water in our state and that which makes its way to the Gulf of Mexico.”

“Reducing nutrient losses is part of the fertilizer industry’s 4R Nutrient Stewardship Program (right source, right rate, right time, right place),” said Jean Payne, President of the Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association. “Illinois ag retailers and certified crop advisers are already making substantial progress with their farmer customers on changes in nitrogen and phosphorus management that minimize environmental impact and ensure long-term profitability for the farmer. The strategy document will help us refine our 4R efforts and enable us to provide accountability to the state on positive changes in fertilizer management.”

Illinois EPA and Illinois Department of Agriculture developed the strategy with representatives from state and federal agencies, agriculture, and non-profit organizations as well as scientists and wastewater treatment professionals. The one-year effort was facilitated by the Illinois Water Resources Center at the University of Illinois and marks the most comprehensive and integrated approach to date for addressing both point and non-point sources of nutrients in Illinois.

“Meeting the challenge of nutrient reduction in the Mississippi River Basin can only be accomplished through shared action,” said David St. Pierre, Executive Director, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. “The MWRD appreciates the states’ leadership in creating a multi-constituent task force, and we are moving forward on significant nutrient reductions in support of the states’ plan.”

“The Illinois Association of Wastewater Agencies, representing 8 million ratepayers of Illinois, appreciates being invited to participate as the State Agencies have prepared this strategy,” said Rick Manner, Nutrient Committee Chairman, Illinois Association of Wastewater Agencies. “As front-line environmental stewards, we’re acutely aware of the financial burden Illinois residents pay in taxes and fees for treating their sewage. We hope that legislators and representatives of Illinois will review this document and weigh in as to the direction we as a state wish to proceed.”

NLRS Comments/3

“Nutrient pollution is Illinois’ most widespread water quality problem, and the release of this draft Strategy is an important step toward solutions that will protect our drinking water and wildlife,” said Dr. Cindy Skrukud, Clean Water Advocate for the Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter. “We are pleased that everyone agrees that overloading our waters with nutrients is a major problem. We will be reviewing this draft Strategy and offering suggestions for strong, specific actions we can take to protect our waters and the health of Illinois families and wildlife.”

The Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy was developed in response to the federal 2008 Gulf of Mexico Action Plan, which calls for the 12 states in the Mississippi River Basin to develop strategies to reduce loading to the Gulf of Mexico, where excess nutrients have led to an aquatic life “dead zone” that stretches for thousands of miles.

A list of the Policy Working Group is attached. For more information on the strategy and public comment period, visit www.epa.state.il.us/water/nutrient/nlrs.html.

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Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy Policy Working Group

Albert Ettinger, Attorney
American Bottoms Regional Wastewater Treatment
Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Downers Grove Sanitary District
Environmental Law and Policy Center
Illinois Corn Growers Association
Illinois Council on Best Management Practices
Illinois Department of Agriculture
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
Illinois Environmental Regulatory Group
Illinois Farm Bureau
Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association
Illinois Pork Producers Association
Illinois State Water Survey, Center for Watershed Science
Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago
Prairie Rivers Network
Sierra Club
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign - Department of Agriculture and Consumer Economics Department of Crop Sciences Department of Natural Resources & Environmental Sciences
University of Illinois Extension
Urbana-Champaign Sanitary District
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service