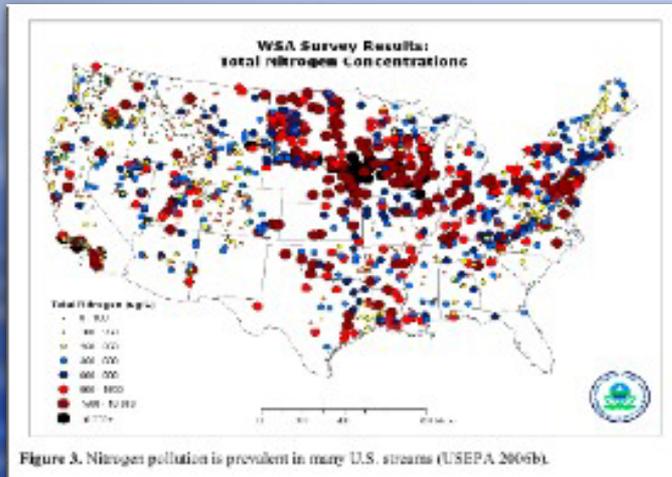


Agriculture and Nutrient Pollution

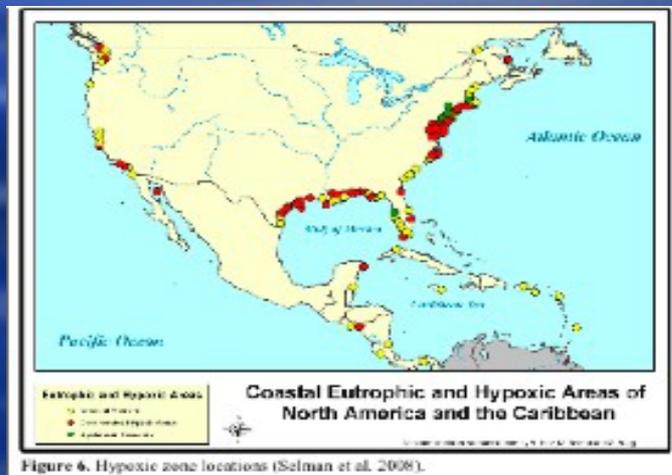
Illinois Nutrient Summit
September 13-14, 2010

Remarks by Craig Cox
Environmental Working Group

Starting Point: We Aren't Getting the Results We Need

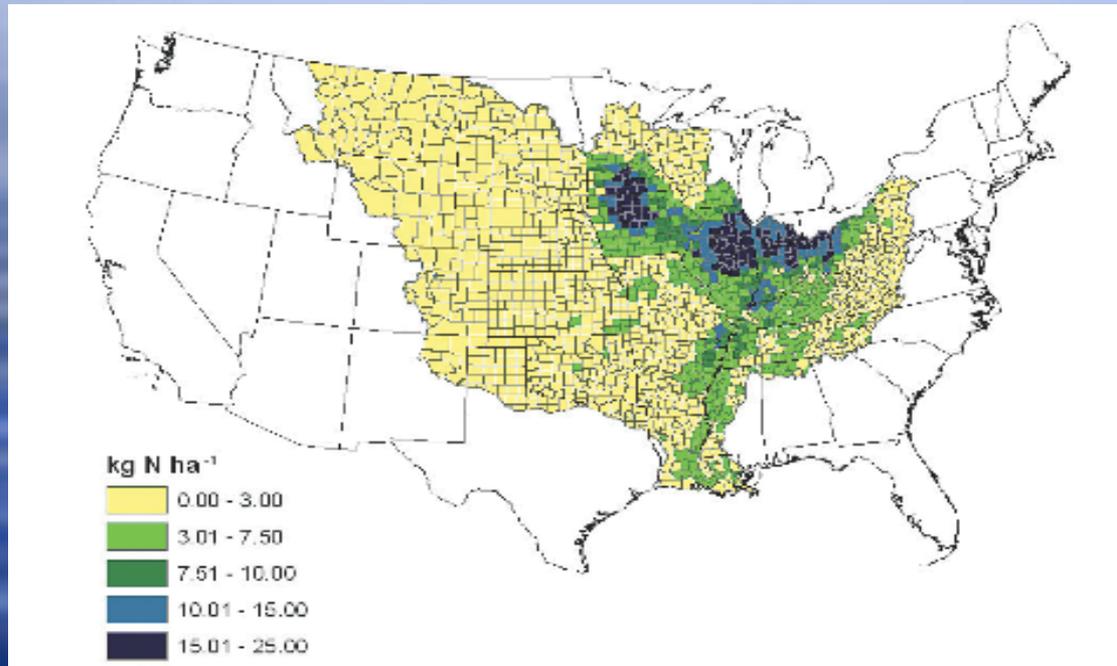


- ◆ “Nitrogen and phosphorus pollution has the potential to become one of the costliest, most difficult environmental problems we face in the 21st century.”



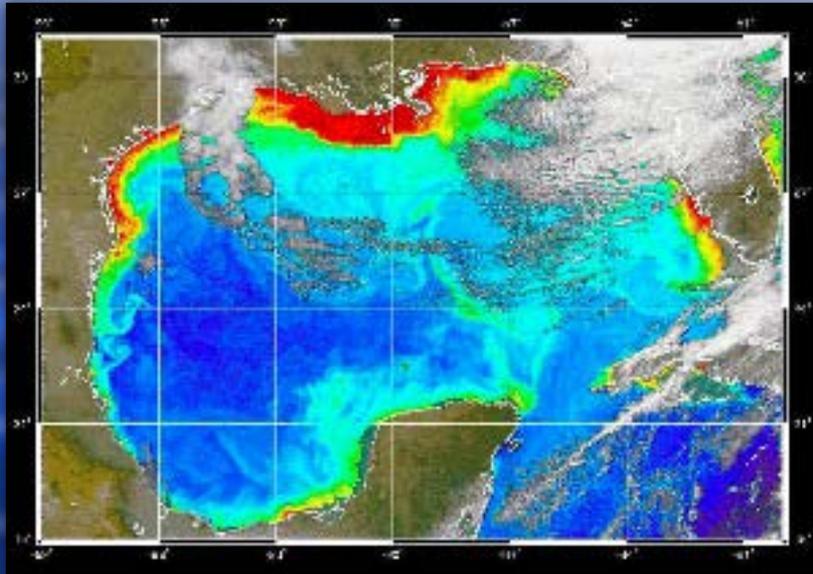
- ◆ “Current efforts to control nutrients have been hard-fought but inadequate...”

Starting Point: Agriculture is a (or the) Major Player



- ◆ Agriculture is the dominant land use in most watersheds.
- ◆ U.S. is an urban nation but an agricultural land.

Starting Point: Stakes are Getting Higher



- ◆ Climate Change:
 - ◆ 10-fold expansion of dead zones?
 - ◆ Double rates of cropland erosion and runoff?
- ◆ 135 million more Americans over next 40 years.

Not a Technical Problem...Yet



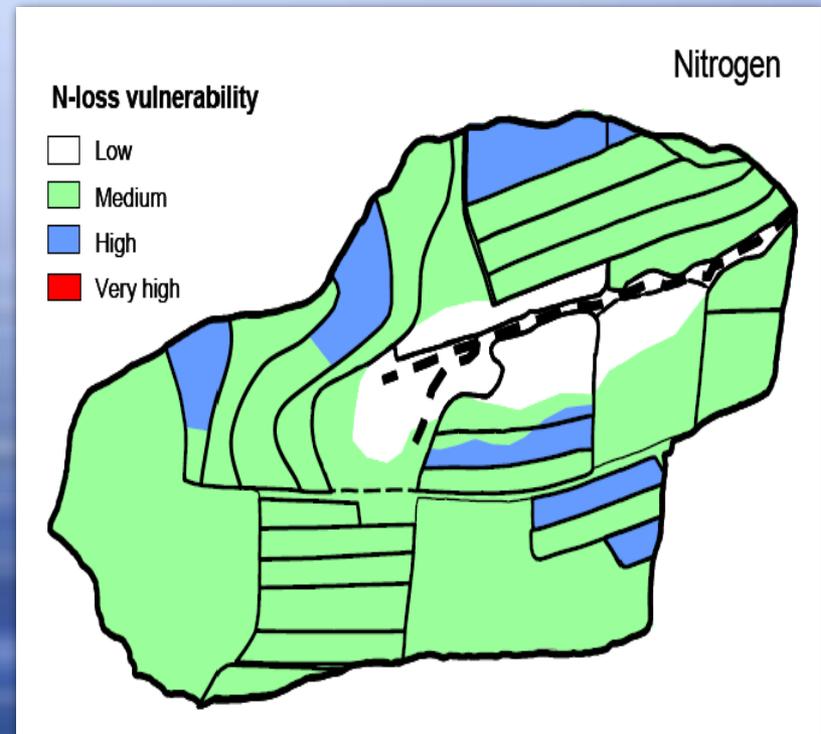
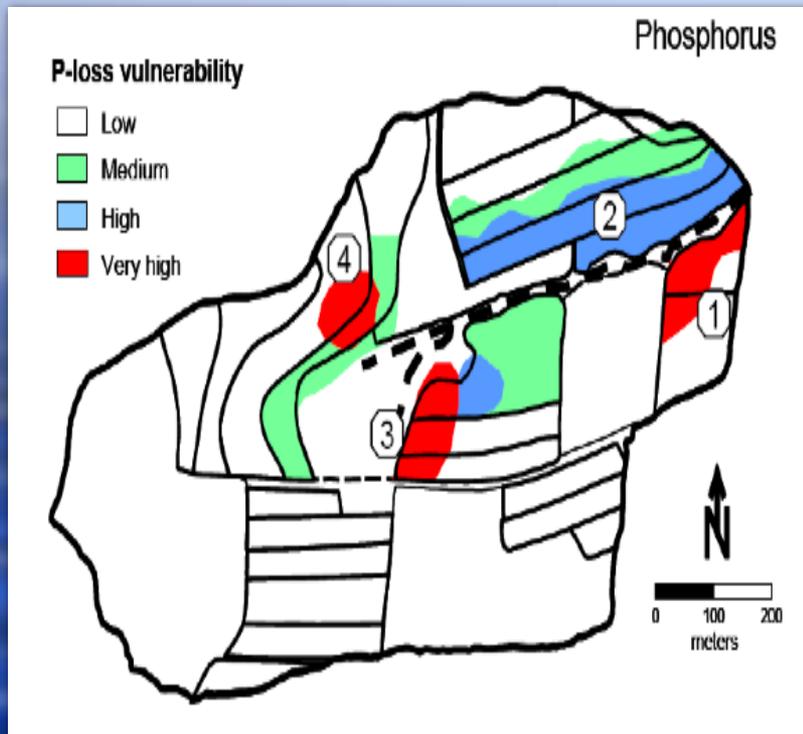
- ◆ Well-understood practices are already available to reduce nutrient pollution.
- ◆ Every one of these practices is being used today by some farmer somewhere in the U.S.
- ◆ Our problem is primarily poor policy and institutional inertia.

Business as Usual Won't Get It Done

We must...

- ◆ Focus voluntary programs to get results.
 - ◆ Priority watersheds.
 - ◆ Precision conservation.
- ◆ Use regulations that work in agriculture.
 - ◆ Carrots with strings.
 - ◆ Precision regulation.
- ◆ Strengthen our technical and scientific network.

Precision Conservation in Priority Watersheds



- ◆ Right practices in the right places for maximum effect.
- ◆ Most program funds must go to watershed water quality projects to harness precision conservation.

Precision Conservation in Priority Watersheds

- ◆ Dozens of studies going back decades argue for focusing funding, but...
 - ◆ Most program dollars are still too broadly dispersed to get water quality results.
 - ◆ Watershed water quality projects get a lot of attention as success stories, but a small share of the money.
- ◆ Political expediency?
 - ◆ Positive politics of targeting: solve pressing problems that matter to constituents.
 - ◆ Failure is good politics?

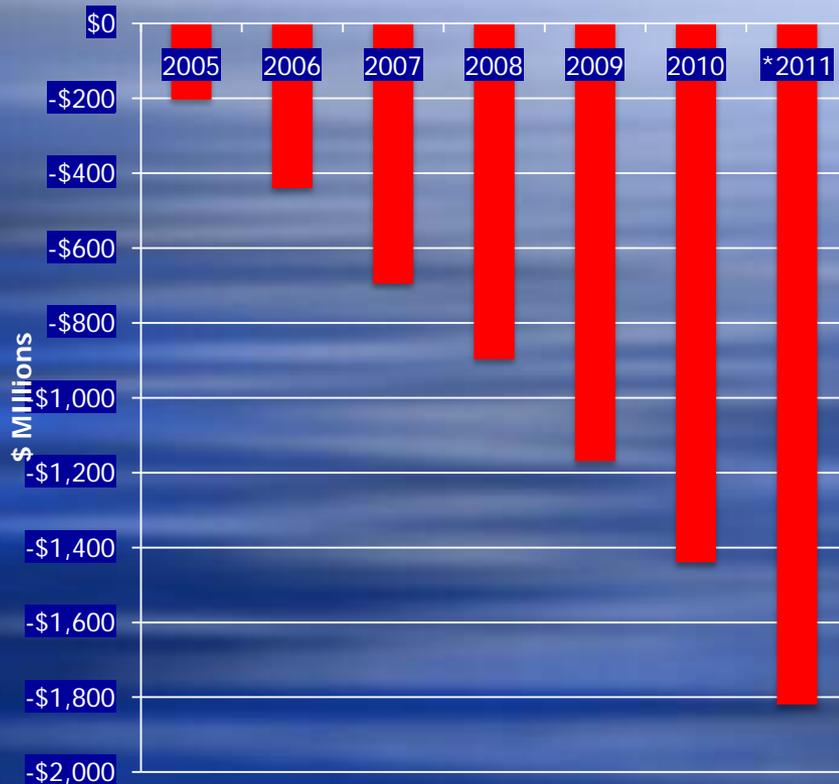
Voluntary Programs Alone Not Enough

- ◆ Inherent weaknesses of voluntary programs:
 - ◆ Producers who volunteer are not necessarily the ones who can make the most difference.
 - ◆ Producers' priorities may differ from program priorities especially if they are picking up part of the tab.
 - ◆ Concerns about equity and equal access loom large when distributing government money; a serious barrier to effective targeting.
- ◆ It takes heroic effort to overcome these weaknesses and our track record is sobering.

Just a Few Sore Spots Defeat a Lot of Voluntary Effort



Broken Funding Promises



- ◆ Funding for conservation programs has fallen short of farm bill promises every year since 2002.
- ◆ Lost \$1.8 billion just since 2005.
- ◆ How committed are we to the voluntary approach?

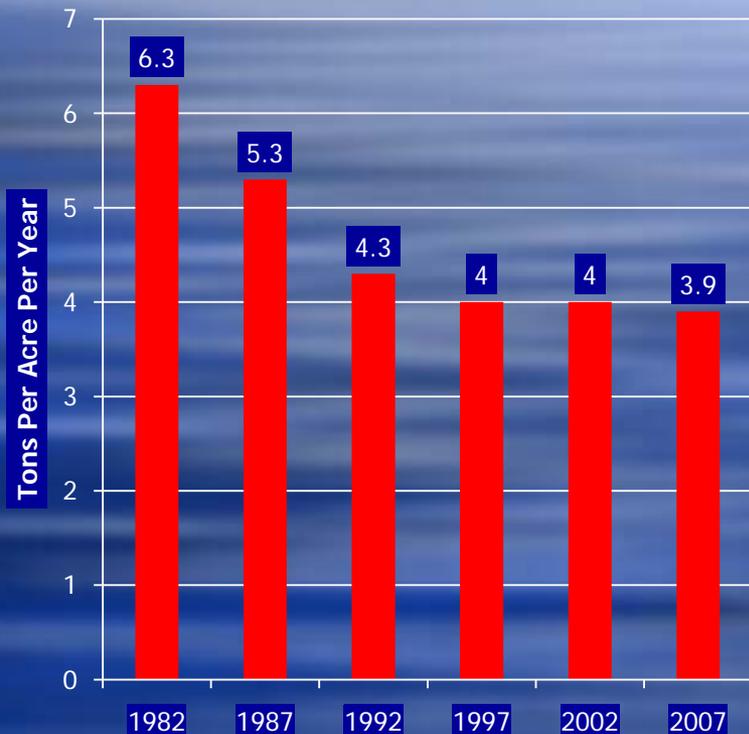
Regulation that Works

- ◆ “We can’t expect taxpayers to pay for everything.”
- ◆ “Agriculture is going to need a speed limit.”
- ◆ Regulation that works in agriculture:
 - ◆ Carrots with Strings: Conservation Compliance.
 - ◆ Precision Regulation: Restrict particularly risky practices in vulnerable locations.
 - ◆ Manure on frozen/snow-covered ground.
 - ◆ Set back crop production from waterways.
 - ◆ Unrestricted and unmanaged access of livestock to streams.

Carrots with Strings

"Conservation Compliance"

Illinois Soil Erosion



- ◆ 1985 Farm Bill required a soil conservation plan to stay eligible for farm subsidies.
- ◆ Cut erosion on the most erosive cropland by 40 percent.
- ◆ Stimulated a new generation of tillage equipment and crop residue management systems.

Carrots with Strings

“Conservation Compliance”

- ◆ Right Now
 - ◆ Ramp up spot checks each year to ensure plans are in place and working.
 - ◆ Statistically sound sample of current conservation plans to see how good they are.
- ◆ Next Farm Bill
 - ◆ Expand agricultural land covered.
 - ◆ Expand requirements with an emphasis on water quality.

Precision Regulation

Target risky practices in vulnerable locations...



Precision Regulation

- ◆ Objective:
 - ◆ Socially acceptable answer to the question: What taxpayers should pay for and what producers should be expected to do on their own.
 - ◆ Affect the least number of producers needed to achieve the greatest improvement in water quality.
 - ◆ Push the right producers into voluntary programs.
 - ◆ Level the playing field for “good actors.”

Technical Assistance and Scientific Support Essential for both precision conservation & regulation...



Technical Assistance and Scientific Support

- ◆ Fraying network is a major, if not the major, barrier to moving forward now.
- ◆ Primary role for federal government should be building this network.
- ◆ Strategic investments in:
 - ◆ Agencies
 - ◆ Universities
 - ◆ Businesses
 - ◆ NGOs

We Can Solve the Problem

- ◆ Act with a sense of urgency.
- ◆ Focus voluntary programs--precision conservation.
- ◆ Put regulations in place that work in agriculture--precision regulation.
- ◆ Build our technical assistance and scientific support network.
- ◆ "Get real, get results."

Thank You And Good Luck

Craig Cox

craig@ewg.org

<http://www.ewg.org/agmag/>