

NEWS RELEASE



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Illinois Releases Final State Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy to Reduce Pollution Loading to Illinois Waters and the Gulf of Mexico *Strategy Emphasizes Coordinated, Voluntary and Cost-Effective Efforts*

SPRINGFIELD – Illinois EPA Director Lisa Bonnett and Illinois Department of Agriculture Director Philip Nelson today announced the release of a finalized statewide strategy designed to improve water quality in Illinois and the Gulf of Mexico. The Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (the Strategy) is the culmination of more than a year of work by a policy working group as well as public input.

The Strategy does not call for new regulations for either point or non-point sources; however, it does rely on the latest science and best available technologies to guide statewide efforts to reduce phosphorus and nitrogen losses that impact Illinois waterways and ultimately 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.

“Illinois EPA appreciates the collaboration of our partners and the public to make this Strategy an action plan that Illinois is committed to implementing,” said Illinois EPA Director Lisa Bonnett. “By building on and scaling up the work that municipalities, sanitary districts, farmers and landowners are already doing to reduce nutrient losses, we will be able to make great strides in protecting Illinois rivers, lakes and streams, as well as reducing our contribution to Gulf of Mexico hypoxia.”

“The NLRS is a success story of collaboration between State agencies, academia, non-profits, and the agricultural industry,” said IDOA Director Philip Nelson. “The next steps in the working groups will be critical to the success of the Strategy.”

The Strategy outlines best management 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.

Final NLRS/2

Key Strategy components include:

- Extending ongoing regulatory and voluntary efforts.
- Identifies priority watersheds for nutrient loss reduction efforts.
- Establishes the Nutrient Monitoring Council to coordinate water quality monitoring efforts.
- Creates the Nutrient Science Advisory Committee to develop numeric nutrient criteria for Illinois waters.
- Identifies strategies for improving collaboration among government, non-profits and industry – Forms the Agricultural Water Quality Partnership Forum and Establishes the Urban Stormwater Working Group.
- Defines a process for regular review and revision by the Policy Working Group for measuring progress and reporting to the public.

“The Illinois Farm Bureau supports the NLRS because it relies on education, outreach and voluntary incentive-based practices to fulfill agriculture’s role in reducing nutrient losses,” said Lauren Lurkins, Director of Natural and Environmental Resources – Illinois Farm Bureau. “IFB worked diligently to help develop the NLRS. In awaiting the final strategy, IFB has been involved in extensive outreach to raise farmer awareness. IFB will continue its active participation in the work group, as well as its leadership in raising awareness and encouraging Illinois farmers to implement the strategy on their own farms.”

“Illinois ag retailers work closely with farmers to implement 4R nutrient practices (right source, rate, time and place) that can reduce nutrient losses and many farmers are already splitting their nutrient applications as is recommended in the Strategy,” said Jean Payne, President of the Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association. “Reducing losses even further will require dedication by ag retailers, certified crop advisers and farmers to adopt enhanced nutrient practices and demonstrate that we are making practical and responsible decisions to improve nutrient utilization and protect water quality.”

Illinois is one of 12 states in the Mississippi River Basin included in U.S. EPA’s 2008 Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan. The plan calls on the 12 states to develop plans to reduce the amount of phosphorus and nitrogen carried to the Gulf of Mexico. Excess nutrients have led to an aquatic life “dead zone” that stretches for thousands of miles.

The Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy was developed by a Policy Working Group led by the Illinois EPA and Illinois Department of Agriculture with representatives from local, state, and federal agencies, agriculture, non-profit organizations, as well as scientists, academics and wastewater treatment professionals. The effort was facilitated by the Illinois Water Resources Center at the University of 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.”

Final NLRS/3

“Overloading our waters with nutrients is a major problem in Illinois, and this broad agreement that we must act together to address it 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. “Today is only the beginning, but when we fully enact this strategy, we will protect our drinking water and create good jobs building the infrastructure we need to improve our water supply for our environment and for our health. We are ready to work with partners throughout the state to take the steps outlined in the strategy to clean up our waterways.”

The final version of the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy and additional information is available at: <http://www.epa.illinois.gov/topics/water-quality/watershed-management/excess-nutrients/nutrient-loss-reduction-strategy/index>.

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