



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 18, 2019

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Illinois' Second Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy Biennial Report Released

*Significant Investments Being Made with Measurable Progress in Reducing
Nutrient Loss*

SPRINGFIELD, IL – The Directors of the Illinois Department of Agriculture and Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced today the release of the state's second Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS) Biennial Report. This document describes the continued progress being made in Illinois to reduce nutrient losses from multiple sources to improve water quality not only in Illinois waterways, but also in the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico.

"The report illustrates all facets of agriculture coming together to promote best management practices," said John Sullivan, Department of Agriculture Director. "The next step is transitioning more farmers from awareness of nutrient loss practices to application."

"The 2019 Biennial Report describes some the dramatic reductions in total phosphorus discharges from some of the largest wastewater treatment facilities in the state," said Illinois EPA Director John Kim. "We've already nearly met one of our 2025 goals of 25% reduction of phosphorus from the point source sector, and we look forward to continued nutrient reductions."

These reductions are being realized as a direct result of investments by wastewater treatment facilities to meet more stringent nutrient permit limits. Illinois officials expect to see continued progress in meeting the long-term goal of 45% reduction in nutrients as additional planned wastewater treatment facility upgrades occur.

The Illinois NLRS was first released in 2015. The Strategy's goal is to reduce the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus in Illinois waterways by 45%. Interim goals include reducing the amount of phosphorus by 25% and nitrogen by 15% by 2025. Implementation efforts are led by Strategy partners in the Policy Working Group and other sector committees, guided by the Illinois Department of Agriculture and Illinois EPA, with assistance provided by the University of Illinois Extension. The Illinois NLRS is part of a broader effort being implemented by states in the Mississippi River Basin to reduce the amount of nutrients entering the Gulf of Mexico, which causes a "dead zone" of oxygen-depleted water.

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During the reporting period of 2017-2018, the agriculture sector invested more than \$59 million in nutrient loss reduction for research, outreach, implementation and monitoring. These contributions have come from Agriculture Water Quality Partnership Forum members and other agriculture related organizations that are working toward reaching the goals set forth in the Illinois NLRS. During that same period, over 84,000 people attended field days, conferences, or workshops to learn about practices that can be implemented to reduce nutrient loss from farm fields.

The Illinois Department of Agriculture administers the state-funded Partners for Conservation program in cooperation with the states' 97 Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The program provides technical and financial incentives to Illinois landowners for the construction or adoption of conservation practices that reduce soil erosion and nutrient loading from non-point agricultural sources and improve water quality. Popular practices include conservation tillage, cover crops, grass waterways, field buffers, streambank stabilization structures, and various other similar practices.

Illinois EPA issues National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits to wastewater treatment facilities (point sources) to regulate the amount of pollutants that can enter Illinois waterways. By the end of 2018, Illinois EPA had issued 65 NPDES permits to wastewater treatment facilities limiting the total phosphorus concentrations to 1.0 mg/L. The Agency expects the number of permits with a total phosphorus limit to grow substantially in the coming years. Data also shows some facilities without permit limits are reducing their nutrient loads by optimizing existing equipment. During the reporting period of 2017-2018, the point source sector invested over \$224 million dollars in nutrient removal technologies and related activities.

The Illinois EPA, through its State Revolving Fund program, provides low interest loans to point source projects addressing water quality issues, including nutrient pollution. This program provided \$668,408,486 in loans from 2017-2018, with \$176,191,342 specifically spent on nutrient removal technologies. In addition, Illinois EPA's Section 319 grant program provides funding for nonpoint source projects designed to achieve nutrient reduction and provides \$3.5 million annually to projects mitigating agriculture and urban stormwater runoff.

The Full Biennial Report is available at: <https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/water-quality/watershed-management/excess-nutrients/Pages/nutrient-loss-reduction-strategy.aspx>.

This Biennial Report will be updated again in 2021. The agencies and organizations leading this effort will continue to collaborate and invest in programs that meet the goals of the Illinois NLRS.

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