



**STATE WATER QUALITY REPORT HIGHLIGHTS COLLABORATION,
STAKEHOLDER COMMITMENT TO REDUCE NUTRIENT LOSS
Farm, Local Government and Environmental Leaders Call for Sustained Investment to Meet Clean
Water Goals**

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The efforts of many local government and state agencies, area farmers and a network of organizational stakeholders to reduce nutrient loss in Illinois waterways and further downstream have been highlighted in a recently released state water quality report.

Monday, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) and the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) released the 2019 Biennial Report on the implementation of the 2015 Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS). The Illinois NLRS is a framework for using science, technology and industry experience to assess and reduce nutrient loss. The report tracks efforts underway throughout the state to reduce these nutrients in Illinois waterways.

“The 2019 NLRS Biennial Report illustrates the incredible momentum our network of partners has built and sustained in our goal of reducing nutrient loss through continued implementation of the state’s framework for success,” said Lauren Lurkins, Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) director of environmental policy. “The NLRS framework guides the education and adoption of innovative agricultural practices, improved wastewater treatment processes and infrastructure, further application of urban stormwater strategies and more. Our stakeholders acknowledged the challenges involved in this long-term project since it first got off the ground with preliminary meetings in 2013, and we will continue to tackle these challenges together. Our commitments, both mental and monetary, remain strong as we work together building a solid future for water quality in the state.”

According to the report, agricultural organizations conducted more outreach and are reaching wider audiences than documented in the first biennial report in 2017. The Illinois NLRS survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service showed that most farmers have at least some knowledge about best management practices listed in the strategy. Approximately

80 percent said that they were knowledgeable about nutrient management or constructed wetlands and 85 percent knew about cover crops.

Specific highlights of this second biennial report of strategy implementation include:

- Annual statewide total phosphorus loads from point sources have achieved a 24 percent reduction, or a 96 percent achievement of its interim goal for 2025;
- There are 39 identified agricultural-related programs, initiatives and projects developed by agencies and non-governmental organizations to help producers establish practices and strategies to reduce nutrient losses;
- The number of woodchip bioreactors in Illinois has nearly doubled over the past two years, jumping from 20 to 37 bioreactors treating 1,345 acres of land;
- Cover crop acres increased more than tenfold from 2011 to 2015 and saw another jump from 2015 to 2017;
- Sediment loads were reduced by 16,475 tons through the IDOA Partners for Conservation Program and additional landowner investments and activities in 2017-18;
- Yet for the 2013-17 period, the statewide water flow, nitrate-N loads and TP loads were estimated to be 13 percent, 7 percent and 26 percent above the 1980-96 baseline period.

“Wastewater agencies have been aggressively working to reduce phosphorus in our discharges, achieving a reduction in loads of 4.3 million pounds per year by 2018,” said Beth Vogt, president of the Illinois Association of Wastewater Agencies. “These reductions have been achieved through capital investments and where possible, process optimizations. In 2018, wastewater agencies invested \$200 million towards nutrient reductions. This could not have been accomplished without the assistance of the Illinois EPA through low interest loans to our members for these construction projects. Financial support from the state is crucial to continuing these reductions to meet the targets set in the strategy.”

The strategy set a 2025 target of a 25 percent reduction in phosphorus and a 15 percent reduction in nitrates leaving the state via Illinois’ major rivers. The ultimate target, as recommended by the U.S. EPA, is a 45 percent reduction in both phosphorus and nitrates and the estimated cost to achieve this target is up to \$800 million per year.

“This report highlights the complexity of the nutrient loss issues in Illinois. The efforts of every sector to reduce losses is remarkable, but the science assessment also makes it clear that we have much work ahead of us in agriculture to meet the goals of reducing nitrogen and phosphorus levels in Illinois rivers, lakes and streams,” said Jean Payne, president of the Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association.

“Increased precipitation and water flow in Illinois from 2013-2017 are factors we cannot control, but we can keep working together to accelerate the adoption of practices that reduce nutrient losses, such as 4R nutrient management, cover crops and reduced tillage.”

Additional figures included in the report indicate agricultural groups have taken steps to encourage and support farmer implementation. Partners in the agricultural sector reported that in 2017 over \$25 million dollars was invested in nutrient loss reduction efforts. In 2018, over \$33 million dollars was invested. Agricultural organizations sponsored hundreds of events for farmers, agricultural retailers and the public about specific best management practices that can reduce nutrient loads in Illinois waters. These events drew upwards of 84,500 people over two years. Multi-media campaigns across print

publications, social media, TV and radio have also provided information about the NLRS and its implementation.

Illinois NLRS was developed by IEPA, IDOA, the University of Illinois, and a multi-stakeholder Policy Working Group of partners such as federal and state agencies, agricultural organizations, wastewater treatment agencies, non-governmental organizations and industries.

The full 2019 Biennial Report is available [here](#). This Biennial Report will be updated again in 2021.

With 2025 just six years away, agricultural, wastewater agencies and environmental organizations believe that additional state funding support should be considered for implementation of the strategy. These resources are needed for Illinois Extension to continue to facilitate the work of the many partner organizations engaged in strategy implementation; for the IEPA and USGS to continue to track and analyze nutrient levels in the state's waters; and, for the IEPA and IDOA to provide cost-share funding for wastewater and agricultural nutrient-capture practices.

"Illinois' nutrient reduction strategy is based on sound science, and strong collaboration between farmers, wastewater agencies and environmental advocates," said Dr. Cindy Skrukud, clean water program director for the Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter. "We have broad agreement on the steps needed to deliver clean water to communities across Illinois, now we need the resources to implement the strategy and protect our water supply."

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About Illinois Association of Wastewater Agencies:

Illinois Association of Wastewater Agencies (IAWA) has been the voice for wastewater in Illinois for ninety-three years and consists of sixty public members that treat 80 percent of the sewage produced in Illinois.

About Illinois Farm Bureau:

The Illinois Farm Bureau is a member of the American Farm Bureau Federation, a national organization of farmers and ranchers. Founded in 1916, IFB is a non-profit, membership organization directed by farmers who join through their county Farm Bureau. IFB has a total membership of more than 386,291 and a voting membership of 79,159. IFB represents three out of four Illinois farmers.

About Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association:

The Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association represents 1,000 business members of the crop production supply and service industry, with a mission of promoting the sound stewardship and utilization of agricultural inputs.

About Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter:

Illinois Sierra Club, with its 100,000 members and supporters, partners with the wastewater, agricultural and labor sectors to improve water quality throughout the state of Illinois.