

http://qctimes.com/water-quality-advocates-say-iowa-s-voluntary-actions-not-working/article_373769de-5a10-50b3-a33e-8710e30177e6.html

Water-quality advocates say Iowa's voluntary actions not working

James Q. Lynch Times Bureau Nov 17, 2016

CEDAR RAPIDS — Water-quality advocates who see little progress toward reducing nitrate and phosphorous pollution in the Mississippi River and Iowa waterways called for bolder action by state and federal agencies, including the possibility of farmland regulations.

“When we look at the status of water quality in the Mississippi and also within the state, we just can’t find much improvement there,” David Osterberg of the Iowa Policy Project said Thursday during a conference call with Iowa reporters. Claims that Iowa’s 2012 voluntary Nutrient Reduction Strategy is producing results “just seems too much rah, rah and not enough careful analysis.”

Also Thursday, the Iowa Environmental Council and Mississippi River Collaborative echoed that concern that current programs are not working. It called for the Environmental Protection Agency to take specific action to regulate excess nitrogen and phosphorus pollution in state waters along the Mississippi River because Iowa and the nine other border states haven’t achieved any significant pollution reductions on their own.

“For 20 years, we have been told the EPA and the states would address the nitrogen and phosphorus pollution that causes the Gulf Dead Zone,” Matt Rota of the Gulf Restoration Network, a Mississippi River Collaborative member, said on a conference call with reporters.

“Despite decades of voluntary efforts in Iowa, nitrate pollution from farm runoff continues to threaten the safety of drinking water,” added Susan Heathcote of the Iowa Environmental Council.

They called for the EPA to set numeric limits of allowable nitrogen and phosphorus in state waters, assess water quality for nitrogen and phosphorus pollution that creates impaired waterways and ensure states develop nutrient reduction strategies with specific implementation plans and adequate funding.

Nitrogen and phosphorus pollutants fuel toxic blue-green algae blooms in Iowa lakes and rivers, resulting in a record number of beach advisories over past two years, along with growing concern about the health impact of these toxins in drinking water supplies, they said.

That’s not only a problem for the Des Moines Water Works, which provides water for 500,000 Iowa, but for the 260 public water supplies that provide drinking water to small towns and rural areas, Heathcote said.

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey defended the voluntary approach. More than 5,000 farmers have signed up to try water-quality practices on their farms and others are implementing conservation practices without state assistance, he said. Forty-five demonstration projects are under way, and more than 100 organizations are participating in these projects.

“These ‘reports’ by activist environmental organizations try to create division where in fact there is broad consensus on the need for action and the path forward,” Northey said. “It is unfortunate these groups try to scare the public to advance their agenda rather than work with the thousands Iowans who are committed to making changes to help improve water quality. When we work together, we can make big stride.”

Despite his confidence in voluntary efforts, spokespersons for both groups said more regulation may be necessary. The Clean Water Act gives the EPA clear authority to impose monitoring, increase oversight and prioritize clean-up efforts, Rota said.

Regulation may be necessary, Osterberg said, because as many as 40 percent of landowners doubt their farming practices have any impact on the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico or on local waterways. Reports show about 40 percent of landowners and producers are spending less than \$1 per acre per year.

Get breaking news sent instantly to your inbox

“That’s not enough to move us any place,” Osterberg said.

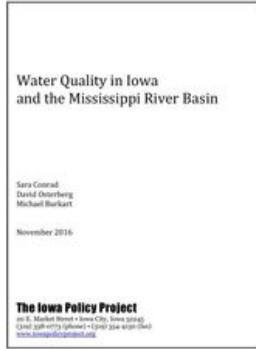
He called for a tax on fertilizer that would raise \$130 million a year in Iowa, money that could be used to fund programs that share the cost of conservation practices with landowners.

The water-quality advocates acknowledged the political challenge they face, especially in light of the presidential election in which voters elected a candidate who called for less federal regulation.

“The Clean Water Act is very clear about what the country expects as far as waters that are fishable, swimmable and drinkable,” Rota said. “That does not change with the new administration. So while politically it might be a little more difficult, legally and morally a lot of these recommendations will stand.”

In Iowa, Heathcote would like to see lawmakers approve a three-eighths-cent sale tax increase for natural resources.

“We’re hopeful this is a bipartisan issue (because) clean water touches all of us,” she said.



Iowa Policy Project water-quality report
Nov 17, 2016



Iowa Environmental Council water-quality report
Nov 17, 2016

Currents

Tech

Tech deals: Check out these Black Friday bargains

Gift Guide:

Gift Guide: For your No. 1 fan, your mother

https://pp2

Photos: Thousands flee as wildfires roar through Great Smoky Mountains

Today's top pics: Rockefeller Center tree lighting and more

Your daily 6: Tiger tries again, Trump launches tour and the high price of '12 days of Christmas'

Today In History, Dec. 1: Rosa Parks

Today's Birthdays, Dec. 1: Woody Allen

Dolphins taking advantage of Ndamukong Suh's versatility

LeBron to wear Cubs uniform after losing Series bet to Wade

New 'Hamilton' CD features songs by Alicia Keys, Sia, Usher

How many days does it take Rolling Stones to make an album?

TODAY'S TOP VIDEO

Video: Paul Ryan defends Donald Trump's Carrier Corp. deal

Video: Paul Ryan defends Donald Trump's Carrier Corp. deal

Video: Wisconsin starts presidential vote recount

Video: Wisconsin starts presidential vote recount

Video: Nancy Pelosi to remain House minority leader

Video: Nancy Pelosi to remain House minority leader

Video: Donald Trump says he will leave business empire 'in total'

Video: Donald Trump says he will leave business empire 'in total'

