



# The Iowa Policy Project

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## A Threat Unmet

### *Report: Iowa's Nutrient Strategy Falls Short Against Water Pollution*

IOWA CITY, Iowa (July 17, 2014) — Iowa needs stronger solutions to water pollution to protect its residents, its neighbors and states downstream.

Nutrient pollution, due largely to farm runoff, is not being addressed well enough with Iowa's current strategies, according to a new report from the nonpartisan Iowa Policy Project (IPP).

The report recommends strengthening the 2013 Nutrient Reduction Strategy (NRS), which relies heavily on voluntary conservation practices that have not worked because a significant share of farmers do not see or acknowledge a problem.

"The Nutrient Reduction Strategy is a blunt tool that takes different approaches to urban and rural runoff, and is especially weak on the larger, rural source of pollution from applied nutrients," said David Osterberg, founder of IPP. He is report co-author with Aaron Kline, a University of Iowa graduate student.

"Given recent trends and documented attitudes, it is clear we need a stronger approach if Iowa is to seriously counter nitrogen and phosphorus pollution in our streams and lakes."

Kline noted evaluations of Iowa waters demonstrate the magnitude of the threat to Iowa water quality, with impaired or potentially impaired ratings in 2012 for over three-fourths of Iowa streams and rivers and about two-thirds of lakes and reservoirs.

#### Iowa Impaired Waters (2012): Over Half Impaired, More Threatened

	Number Assessed	Potentially Impaired	Impaired
Streams and Rivers	901	200 (23%)	490 (55%)
Lakes and Reservoirs	201	16 (8%)	117 (58%)

In 2010, the "Dead Zone" in the Gulf of Mexico was 7,700 square miles, one of the five highest recordings ever — attributable, the report notes, to pollution from the north, including Iowa.

The report, available at [www.iowapolicyproject.org](http://www.iowapolicyproject.org), notes Iowa's NRS sets a goal of reducing nitrogen and phosphorus discharges by 45 percent in an effective and cost-efficient manner — yet includes no target date by which to achieve these goals.

The authors suggest six changes of policy and approach that are necessary to bolster the NRS:

- Giving focused attention to the problem, especially important to a voluntary-oriented approach.

- Assuring sufficient funding, contrary to recent vetoes by Governor Terry Branstad of funding approved by the Iowa Legislature.
- Adopting nutrient criteria standards for all Iowa waters, which would follow federal EPA guidelines for reducing nutrient loads.
- Initiating water-quality monitoring to determine whether the 45 percent goal is being met.
- Asking each farm to implement at least two conservation practices.
- Making all understand that more regulation will follow if this voluntary strategy does not work.

“We must recognize lots of farmers routinely take great care with their practices, and many already are implementing more than one conservation practice,” Osterberg said. “If all farmers were like those farmers, a voluntary strategy would be workable. As we suggest in the report, conservation must be practiced by more than those who willingly accept that responsibility.”

The report states private- and public-sector partnerships and producers recognizing that conservation can make land more productive will be needed to implement the sweeping landscape-scale change that is called for in the NRS.

“Changes toward conservation investments must go beyond just the willing and motivate those who claim not to understand the connection between farm practices and water quality,” the report states.

The authors conclude that success of the NRS in reaching the 45 percent nutrient reduction will require additional financial support, new practices on every farm, buffers along streams or other practices.

The Iowa Policy Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit public policy research and analysis organization based in Iowa City. For more information, see [www.iowapolicyproject.org](http://www.iowapolicyproject.org).

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