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## Group urges more EPA action on water pollution

By Anthony Watt, [awatt@qconline.com](mailto:awatt@qconline.com) Nov 17, 2016

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A group advocating a cleaner Mississippi River wants stronger action by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to control nitrogen and phosphorous pollution.

When these substances appear naturally, they feed aquatic plants and algae, which in turn are food for animals within a waterway, according to an EPA profile. An overdose of these nutrients, often caused by human activity such as agriculture, can cause algae populations to explode.

This imbalance can reduce oxygen in the water, kill fish and increase the toxins produced by some algae.



On Thursday, the Mississippi River Collaborative -- a group of 13 entities seeking to reduce river pollution -- released their assessment of federally guided efforts to curb nutrient pollution.

"The results were not encouraging," said Matt Rota, senior policy director of the Gulf Restoration Network.

Plans currently in place by states along the Mississippi River often lack adequate timelines, benchmarks and assurances to encourage minimizing nutrient pollution and measure success, according to Mr. Rota and Susan Heathcote, water program director for the Iowa Environmental Council. Many states are not adequately assessing waterways for nutrient pollution, or don't do it at all, they said.

The coalition says the EPA has not done enough to get such elements in place and should take a stronger leadership role. Although the group has sued the EPA over the issue and is awaiting a final result in the case, they said Thursday's news conference was not evidence of lack of faith in that case.

"We're tired of waiting," Mr. Rota said.

In a Thursday afternoon statement, the EPA said its emphasis is on partnering with states and groups that target action in the waterways with the most acute problems, and developing long-term reduction strategies.

"EPA cannot solve nutrient pollution by top-down federal action," an agency statement said. The release also said that, as part of its efforts, the EPA in the near future plans to release \$600,000 to state or tribal government programs that promise measurable reduction of nutrient pollution.

Bob Sinkler, water infrastructure director for The Nature Conservancy, said he believes the responsibility for driving water quality improvements should not be on the shoulders of just one agency. Instead, it should be a collaborative effort at as local a level as possible to identify the worst problems and best use limited resources.

"It really is a multi-jurisdictional issue," he said.

In October, The Nature Conservancy and River Action participated in the 2016 Upper Mississippi River Conference in the Quad-Cities. This year's theme was improving the overall quality of the river, from infrastructure to water condition.

Kathy Wine, executive director of River Action, said there are a number of local success stories. Farmers in Rock Island and Scott counties have adopted practices to reduce such pollution. There are plans to introduce bioreactors to the area that can measure pollutants and filter them out, she said.

On Thursday, Mr. Sinkler and Ms. Wine said conference participants still are working on a report outlining goals developed during the Quad-Cities event. That report will include recommendations for addressing nutrient pollution, Ms. Wine said.



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