

# Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan 2008

for Reducing, Mitigating, and Controlling Hypoxia  
in the Northern Gulf of Mexico and Improving  
Water Quality in the Mississippi River Basin



# Contents

<b>Moving Forward on Gulf Hypoxia</b>	<b>2</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Framework for Action</b>	<b>8</b>
■ Principles	8
■ Goals	9
■ Critical Needs	10
<b>Progress and Reassessment 2001–2007</b>	<b>14</b>
■ Trends in the Size of the Hypoxic Zone	14
■ Trends in Nitrogen and Phosphorus in the Basin	15
■ Progress on Actions in the <i>2001 Action Plan</i>	17
■ Updating the Science	20
■ Conclusions from the Reassessment	21
<b>Next Steps: Getting Results</b>	<b>28</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Actions to Accelerate the Reduction of Nitrogen and Phosphorus</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Actions to Advance the Science, Track Progress and Raise Awareness</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>60</b>
<hr/>	

# 1

*Complete and implement comprehensive nitrogen and phosphorus reduction strategies for states within the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River Basin encompassing watersheds with significant contributions of nitrogen and phosphorus to the surface waters of the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River Basin, and ultimately to the Gulf of Mexico.*

## WHY DO THIS?

Because the soils, hydrology, land use, and cropping practices as well as the legal, legislative, and administrative framework vary considerably across the 31 states in the Basin, the Task Force recognizes that no single approach to nutrient reduction would be effective in every state. All states already have programs to reduce nutrient losses from both point and nonpoint sources. However, while most states have plans within those programs to reduce their water quality problems, those plans are often focused on local or regional water quality. Existing plans may need to be modified to incorporate nitrogen and phosphorus reduction activities within the state to reduce loadings to the Gulf, while continuing to protect and restore local water quality. These strategies will provide a road map for each state, a more detailed basis for budget development and implementation, and a vehicle for coordination with other states in the Basin. Once the state strategies are developed and adopted by the broad reach of stakeholders throughout each state, and new funding

is provided, Federal and State agencies and many involved stakeholders can accelerate their efforts to reduce nutrient impacts on local waters and the Gulf.

## WHO WILL TAKE THE LEAD?

Mississippi/Atchafalaya River Basin States, Federal agencies

## WHO ELSE WILL HELP?

Sub-basin Committees, local stakeholder groups, and other regional groups

## HOW DO WE DO THIS?

State nutrient reduction strategies should be completed as soon as possible but no later than 2013. Strategies should target those watersheds with significant contributions of nitrogen and phosphorus to the surface waters of the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River Basin and ultimately to the Gulf of Mexico. Ongoing nutrient



pollution control efforts should continue, while states, in collaboration with other states in the Basin and Federal agencies, complete the strategies and seek necessary funding. Implementation of the state strategies should be started as soon as practicable, but no later than 2013. The development of state nutrient reduction strategies as prescribed by this plan is to be complementary to, and shall in no way delay or interfere with the progress of any existing or planned nutrient reduction activities, or identification of priority watersheds. To further advance progress, the States should provide a list of activities for incorporation into the Annual Operating Plans, identifying planned nutrient reduction activities and the corresponding availability and needs for funding.

Implementation of the Action Plan will require a significant level of commitment from the Federal agencies and State and local governments, and increased awareness and action by the many varied stakeholders. Existing relationships with key stakeholders should be maintained and additional relationships developed with other stakeholders to develop and implement strategies to reduce nutrient loads to the Gulf of Mexico and to water bodies within the Basin. The States are uniquely

qualified to identify the key stakeholders within their states who can influence opinion and support needed changes in practices and programs. State agencies have established relationships with their constituents, whether agricultural producers or regulated entities such as wastewater facilities. This approach will allow Federal and State agencies and stakeholders in each state to focus on activities that will be most effective in their area.

## WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL NEEDS?

Federal agencies, working with the States and the Sub-Basin Committees, will need to establish incentives through the 319 program, Farm Bill programs, or other federal funding sources to provide additional resources for the development and implementation of state-level nutrient reduction strategies.

The States and Federal agencies must coordinate efforts across organizations and programs and use adaptive management to modify the strategies as new information and innovative solutions are acquired to identify critical watersheds, assess current conditions, and maximize potential nitrogen and phosphorus reductions with the most cost-effective approaches.

## On-Farm Assistance

Since 2005, over \$1 million has been provided to landowners in Arkansas for installation of on-farm structures to reduce sediment and nutrient runoff. These projects have been implemented in the Arkansas River and Bayou Bartholomew/Beouf-Tensas basins. Overwhelming public participation and interest has created additional opportunities for implementation of nutrient reduction programs in other Mississippi River tributary watersheds.