



February 22, 2021

**HTF Member State Representatives**

Secretary Mike Naig, Chair  
Iowa Department of Agriculture and  
Land Stewardship

J. Ryan Benefield, Deputy Director  
Arkansas Department of Agriculture

Kristi Jones, Deputy Director  
Illinois Department of Agriculture

Bruce Kettler, Director  
Indiana State Department of Agriculture

John Webb, Interim Member  
Watershed Management Branch  
Manager-Kentucky Division of Water

Harry Vorhoff, Deputy Director  
Louisiana Governor's Office of  
Coastal Activities

Katrina Kessler, Assistant Commissioner  
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Chris Wells, Executive Director  
Mississippi Department of  
Environmental Quality

Kurt Boeckman, Director of Soil and  
Water Conservation Program  
Missouri Department of Natural  
Resources

Kirk Hines, Deputy Director  
Ohio Department of Agriculture

John McClurkan, Administrator  
Land and Water Stewardship  
Tennessee Department of Agriculture

James Zellmer, Deputy Administrator  
Environmental Management Division-  
Wisconsin Department of Natural  
Resources

Kevin Norton, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC)  
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)  
12080 Maryland Ave. SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Via e-mail to [kevin.norton@usda.gov](mailto:kevin.norton@usda.gov)

Subject: Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force: Transition Letter

Dear Acting Deputy Under Secretary, Farm Production and Conservation-

As member states of the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force (herein referred to as the Hypoxia Task Force), we are eager to work with the Biden-Harris Administration to continue the development of robust, cost-effective solutions for nutrient reduction throughout the Mississippi River watershed and the Gulf of Mexico. While important strides in conservation practices and point and nonpoint source loading reductions have been achieved, attaining the goals we have collectively set for reducing nutrient loading through the *Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan* will require acceleration of its implementation, through expanded regional collaboration among farmers, municipalities, and conservation interests.

The Hypoxia Task Force is a partnership of 12 states and five federal agencies that works collaboratively, supporting efforts to reduce nutrient loading throughout the Mississippi River Basin and the extent of the hypoxic zone in the northern Gulf of Mexico. The *Action Plan* has a near term target of reducing nutrient loading (nitrogen and phosphorus) to the Gulf from the basin by 20% by 2025, and a long term goal of limiting the Gulf hypoxic zone to an average annual size of less than 5,000-square kilometers by 2035.

We, as member states, provide leadership for state initiatives in support of the Hypoxia Task Force's overall target. States have led the development and ongoing implementation of our respective state-specific nutrient reduction strategies, with extensive stakeholder engagement as a means for advancing the *Action Plan*. In 2020, we organized seven topic-specific work groups to promote regional collaboration among our member states and federal agencies around shared opportunities and challenges. These include ecosystem/social metrics to measure progress, water quality monitoring, innovative best management practices, research, communications,



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challenges faced with Corps mitigation requirements, and funding. States appreciate the ongoing coordination between states and federal leadership to focus on these specific items to help accelerate, prioritize, and scale implementation efforts.

Many of our states have created dedicated programs and funding streams to advance the strategies' actions. As the 2015 Revised Goal of the *Action Plan* states clearly, "neither the Interim Target nor the Final Goal can be achieved without significant additional resources."<sup>i</sup> We acknowledge and appreciate the ongoing financial and technical support from USEPA, NRCS, and NOAA over the past decade to aid in the states' development of the nutrient reduction strategies. However, resources focused specifically at nutrient reduction actions continue to be the limiting factor in reaching the goals established in the *Action Plan*. Additionally, many of the practices proven to reduce nonpoint source nutrient losses have many ancillary national benefits such as habitat for wildlife and pollinator species, and greenhouse gas reductions.

We respectfully request that the Administration continue the collaborative efforts and partnership of the Hypoxia Task Force and increase federal support for the *Action Plan* and ongoing implementation of the states' nutrient reduction strategies. We believe that the Hypoxia Task Force is a model of good government, focusing on collaboration among states as well as between federal agencies, states, landowners, commodity groups, land-grant universities, conservation interests, and the private sector. These partnerships are fundamental to successful implementation of the states' nutrient reduction strategies. We look forward to working with you and your Administration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Naig". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "N".

Mike Naig  
Iowa Secretary of Agriculture  
States Co-Chair – Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force

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<sup>i</sup> Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan New Goal Framework, December 2014,  
<https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-07/documents/htf-goals-framework-2015.pdf>.