

For immediate release

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Great Lakes Commission and USDA-NRCS launch innovative phosphorus trading program

Ann Arbor, Mich. – To help alleviate high nutrient levels and algal blooms, a phosphorus credit trading program for the Lower Fox River watershed in Wisconsin will be developed under a partnership between the Great Lakes Commission (GLC) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS).

USDA Deputy Under Secretary Ann Mills, acknowledging the new partnership, said: “This agreement between the Great Lakes Commission and USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service adds an innovative tool to the Great Lakes restoration toolkit that can create new revenue opportunities for farmers, while simultaneously achieving cost-effective pollution reductions.”

Funded through USDA-NRCS Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funds, the phosphorus credit trading program in the Lower Fox River area is seen as a cost-effective approach to achieve water quality goals and increase overall environmental and economic benefits. For example, it may be more cost effective for a point source, such as a sewage treatment plant, to pay for a credit to reduce pollution from urban or rural runoff sources than to install extremely expensive equipment to treat end-of-pipe discharges.

The project is expected to foster and support voluntary conservation action by private landowners to protect and restore priority watersheds within the Great Lakes basin. It also addresses issues in one of the priority watersheds identified by the GLRI. The Fox River has been designated by the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources as impaired under the U.S. Clean Water Act.

Wisconsin’s nutrient standards are some of the most progressive in the nation, according to Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Water Division Administrator Kenneth G. Johnson, chairman of the Great Lakes Commission. “This project will provide mechanisms for water users, from various sectors,

Great Lakes Commission

Kenneth G. Johnson (WI), Chair; Tim A. Eder, Executive Director
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to engage with each other in a non-regulatory manner to make decisions that help to reduce nutrient loadings to our land and water resources. It's a winning strategy."

Like many other watersheds in the Great Lakes region, the Fox River – one of five Areas of Concern in Wisconsin – suffers from water pollution problems, including harmful algal blooms (HABs), runoff pollution from urban and rural areas, municipal and industrial wastewater discharges, and degraded habitats. In most cases, HABs are caused by excess nutrients, especially phosphorus, which comes from a variety of sources including point sources – cities and industries – and nonpoint runoff from urban and rural lands.

Tim Eder, executive director of the Great Lakes Commission, says this project will demonstrate that trading is a viable approach to reducing pollution in Great Lakes watersheds. "We will design the phosphorus trading program to be transferrable to other areas in the Great Lakes region so we can maximize the positive impacts and investment of USDA-NRCS."

The USDA-NRCS and GLC have previously partnered on the highly successful Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control, which has supported over 400 demonstration projects throughout the Great Lakes region in the last two decades resulting in 1.6 million tons of soil saved and more than 1.6 million pounds of phosphorus reduced.

According to Eder, the GLC will collaborate closely with other federal and State of Wisconsin agencies, cities, industries, tribal and agricultural interests and non-governmental organizations in the local area to build on the years of effort and experience in the watershed.

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The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by Kenneth G. Johnson, water division administrator at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, is an interstate compact agency established under state and U.S. federal law and dedicated to promoting a strong economy, healthy environment and high quality of life for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region and its residents. The Commission consists of governors' appointees, state legislators, and agency officials from its eight member states. Associate membership for Ontario and Québec was established through the signing of a "Declaration of Partnership." The Commission maintains a formal Observer program involving U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, tribal authorities, binational agencies and other regional interests. The Commission offices are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Learn more at www.glc.org.