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Bay Program Partners Continue to Reduce Pollutants Entering Chesapeake Bay

Simulations of pollution controls show reductions in nitrogen, phosphorous, sediment

Information embargoed until 10 a.m. on Monday, March 24, 2014

Annapolis, MD – Pollution controls put in place by Chesapeake Bay Program partners over the last four years have lowered the amount of nutrients and sediment entering the Chesapeake Bay, which is an essential step toward improving water quality and environmental health.

Each year, the seven jurisdictions in the watershed—Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia—report to the Bay Program the steps they have taken to lower the nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment entering rivers and streams. Our experts run this information through a suite of computer simulations, which generate estimates that tell us how far the jurisdictions have come toward reducing pollution to levels that would lead to a healthy Bay—and how far there is to go.

As a whole, reductions in phosphorous and sediment are on track. Pollution reductions from the wastewater sector are also largely on track or ahead of schedule, but efforts to reduce nutrient and sediment pollution from urban streets, farm fields and onsite septic systems are lagging behind.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) uses this data as part of its assessment of jurisdictions' progress toward the pollution reduction milestones outlined in the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or "pollution diet." The EPA's next progress assessment is expected to be released in June. By 2017, partners are expected to have practices in place to achieve at least 60 percent of the pollution reduction targets necessary to meet water quality standards in the Bay compared to 2009. Jurisdictions' Phase II Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) identify strategies to achieve these goals.

Facts

Estimates show that jurisdictions' efforts to control pollution over the last four years have reduced nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment loads to the Chesapeake Bay by 7, 11 and 6 percent, respectively.

Since 2009:

- Nitrogen loads have decreased 20 million pounds to 262.38 million pounds/year.
- Phosphorous loads have decreased 2.04 million pounds to 17.19 million pounds/year.
- Sediment loads have decreased 497 million pounds to 8,178 million pounds/year.

This represents 27, 43 and 37 percent of the nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment reductions since 2009 that are necessary to meet the partnership's 2025 goal that the necessary pollution-reducing practices are in place to meet water quality standards in the Bay.

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Issues

Excess nutrients and sediment impair water quality: nitrogen and phosphorous can fuel the growth of algae blooms and lead to low-oxygen "dead zones" that suffocate marine life, while sediment can block sunlight from reaching underwater grasses and suffocate shellfish. Best management practices used in backyards, in cities and on farms lower the flow of nutrients and sediment into waterways.

Importance

The Chesapeake Bay Program's Reducing Pollution indicators present the most current data on our partners' collective progress toward meeting their goals to lower the nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment entering rivers, streams and the Chesapeake Bay. This data provides leaders with the science-based information that can help them assess pollution-reducing practices and adapt their management decisions accordingly.

Jurisdictions' progress toward reducing nutrient and sediment pollution is a product of their work to meet the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or "pollution diet." Each jurisdiction's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) outlines strategies to meet the TMDL. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) oversees progress toward these goals.

Related News

- Bay Program partners continue to slow pollution flow into rivers and streams

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We Recommend:

- Chesapeake Bay Program 2013 Reducing Pollution Data:
  - Reducing Nitrogen Pollution
  - Reducing Phosphorous Pollution
  - Reducing Sediment Pollution

Videos:

- Bay 101: Algae Blooms
- Bay 101: Stormwater Runoff
- Bay 101: Wastewater Treatment Plants

Photos:

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