

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Nutrient runoff scrutiny serious

By STEVE TAYLOR

Viewpoint

THIS has been the "season of spin" with this fall's state and national elections. Still, political campaigns do not have a monopoly on spin.

The National Academy of Science released a report earlier this fall addressing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers habitat restoration projects, which are dumping large amounts of sediment and nutrients into the Missouri River. The "spin" comes in regarding what sediment is harmful, depending on who's responsible for the sediment and why.

NAS report states that the ACE habitat projects are dumping around 10,700 metric tons and 19,400 metric tons per year of sediment into the Missouri River, which represents 6% to 12% of the current phosphorus load from the Mississippi basin. The report states that phosphorus causes hypoxia, but that it is not appropriate to relate this phosphorus to increases in Gulf hypoxia. This is because the cause and effect of nutrient runoff to Gulf hypoxia is complicated and can only be modeled. The science is not exact.

But, the "spin" really starts to swirl when, on the one hand, the federal government says it's okay for the ACE to continue dumping phosphorus into the river, while businesses along the river and agriculture are severely scrutinized for the nutrients we contribute. This simply is not fair, and is a double standard.

The report seems to acknowledge the need to hold the ACE to some level of accountability by recommending, "All actions by the ACE that discharge sediment to the Missouri River should be subjected to monitoring requirements." That's fine. But, perhaps we should only subject private businesses to monitoring requirements as well, instead of requiring permits?

Seems only fair, right?

Beyond water quality in the Gulf, another issue the report addresses is that of the U.S. EPA requiring states to meet water-quality standards as required by the Federal Clean Water Act. The report admonishes EPA to support states' efforts to revise existing narrative criteria, rather than forcing numeric criteria — such as EPA is currently doing in Florida.

At this point, you may be asking, "Why should I care?" Here's why. The federal government is proposing tremendous expansion of regulations and initiatives to reduce nutrient runoff. The federal government is using Chesapeake Bay and Florida as templates to spread throughout the nation. The end result could be less land for agricultural production, more land for wetlands and more stringent regulations on how we do our business and on production agriculture.

The Missouri Agribusiness Association is dedicating significant resources in working with our national affiliates and other allies in pushing back on unnecessary regulations.

Taylor is executive director of Missouri Agribusiness Association, Jefferson City.



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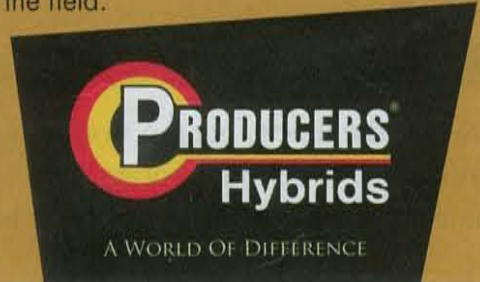
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