Water Quality and Sustainable Practices on Land

Objective

Enhance water quality in the ocean, along our coasts, and in the Great Lakes by promoting and implementing sustainable practices on land.

Why Do This?

Pollution from diffuse sources throughout the country caused by poor land management practices negatively impacts water quality in ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes ecosystems, resulting in harmful algal blooms, expansive dead zones, marine debris, and increased incidents of human illness. Addressing this problem requires a strong commitment to coordination and cooperation between multiple sectors and among Federal, State, tribal, local authorities, and regional governance structures.

Potential Actions and Expected Outcomes

- **Reduce rural and urban sources of excessive nutrients and sediments** – This action will enhance aquatic ecosystem health, reduce costs to wastewater treatment plants, retain storage capacity in flood control structures, and enhance recreational opportunities.

- **Assess hypoxia status, trends, and impacts nationwide -** Severe oxygen depletion or hypoxia is the most readily recognized symptom of impaired water quality. Studying hypoxia will help to mitigate or prevent mass fish kills, loss of reefs, economic impacts on commercial and sport fisheries, and degradation of ecosystem health.

- **Reduce trash and marine debris through pollution prevention and removal –** This action will use a comprehensive approach to mitigate the adverse effects of marine debris and trash in our watersheds, the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes on human health, the environment, and the economy.

- **Assess health risks of coastal waters -** A better understanding of current and emerging health risks from impaired water quality, as well as the connections between upstream sources of pollution and downstream effects, will enhance disease surveillance, environmental/wildlife monitoring and watershed modeling, and inform remediation efforts.

- **Provide warning and reduce public health risks of coastal waters -** Connecting environmental monitoring with disease surveillance will help to quickly identify threats and notify communities of risks associated with contaminated recreational and drinking waters, seafood, and beaches; reduce health risks from pollutants; and help safeguard coastal resource-dependent economies.

- **Identify and protect high quality coastal waters** – This action will help to ensure the sustainability of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes ecosystems and their associated public benefits.