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Record-Breaking Nitrates Unacceptable

Des Moines, IA – Record-breaking nitrates found in both the Raccoon and the Des Moines Rivers, the drinking source for hundreds of thousands of Central Iowans, should be a wake-up call for legislators before they adjourn for the session.

Des Moines Water Works' reports of 24 mg/l in the Raccoon River and 17.87 mg/l in the Des Moines River (previous records were 22 mg/l and 14.2 mg/l respectively) represent totally unacceptable levels of nitrates in our drinking water. Nitrates can cause serious illness in humans.

"The responsibility for the nitrate levels falls on the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and the Farm Bureau," said Debbie Neustadt, Sierra Club Iowa Chapter chair. "We've had this problem for 40 years and industry continues to resist any form of regulation that would improve our water quality."

In November 2012, the Iowa Department of Land Stewardship and the Department of Natural Resources released the *Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy*. The strategy is intended to reduce the amount of Nitrogen and Phosphorus that floats through the Mississippi River watershed (of which both the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers are a part) into the Gulf of Mexico and contributes to the hypoxia (more commonly known as the "dead zone") there. The Iowa "strategy" calls for targeting "...voluntary conservation measures, in conjunction with research, development and demonstration of new approaches."

"The Iowa Nutrient Strategy is based on the false premise that Iowa is making significant progress in reducing water pollution and that no real changes need to be made in what thus far has been a voluntary and ineffective approach to nonpoint sources of pollution," said Wally Taylor, Sierra Club Iowa Chapter Legal chair.

Legislation being considered during this session includes allocating \$7 million for implementing the nutrient reduction strategy but requires no accountability to whoever receives the funds.

"How much more evidence do policymakers need to understand that voluntary conservation measures are ineffective?" said Neila Seaman, Sierra Club Iowa Chapter director. "Agricultural runoff is resulting in record nitrate levels of our drinking water."

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