



Water Runoff Pollution Threatens Illinois Economy

Clean Water is Good for Business

Runoff pollution damages Illinois industries, including agriculture and tourism/recreation. Handled poorly, runoff pollution costs businesses and other taxpayers billions of dollars every year.

What is Runoff Pollution?

Runoff water is rain not immediately absorbed and filtered by the ground that instead runs off the surface, seeping into streams, ponds, rivers, lakes, and oceans. Byproducts of modern agriculture, urbanization and industry all contaminate runoff water.

Agricultural runoff comes from livestock waste and chemical products such as fertilizers and synthetic pesticides. All contain high levels of nitrogen, phosphorous, and other compounds that rain sluices into bodies of water, where they cause pollution and fertilize algae blooms that kill fish.

Urban runoff results from oil, grease, antifreeze, brake fluid and other polluting products deposited by motor vehicles on roads, in parking lots and other impervious paved surfaces, and from improper disposal of products such as paint and lawn care chemicals. All mix with rainwater that carries them directly into bodies of water before topsoil can absorb them.

Industrial runoff is caused by inadequate disposal of industrial waste. Every year, coal-burning power plants emit millions of tons of coal ash; fine particles infused with toxins like sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and carbon monoxide.



IN A SNAPSHOT

- In 2012, over 9,600 miles of Illinois rivers and streams and over 144,000 acres of Illinois lakes, reservoirs, and ponds were rated “impaired” — too polluted for human use — by the EPA.
- Illinois has 75,000+ downstate farms employing 200,000 people and generating over \$70 billion a year; All of them rely on the state’s rivers and lakes for water.
- Farming-related businesses are also affected, including the 2800+ food processing-related companies that make Illinois #1 in the U.S. with \$180 billion in processed food sales.
- Other industries damaged by runoff are tourism/recreation and commercial fishing, especially along Lake Michigan’s 63-mile coast in Illinois. Twenty million people visit the area each year; recreation, including boating, fishing and swimming, generates \$3.2 billion yearly and supports 33,000 jobs. Every Great Lakes restoration dollar creates three dollars in economic impact for Great Lakes states.

These fall on waterways and on the ground, to mix with rainwater as runoff pollution.

Runoff Pollution Costs Illinois Businesses

Runoff pollution endangers thousands of Illinois businesses and the livelihoods of millions. Agriculture is one of the biggest sources of runoff pollution but is also one of the industries that will lose the most if runoff pollution is not controlled. Non-point runoff pollution (from a combination of agricultural, industrial, and urban sources) is the biggest source of water pollution in Illinois.

Runoff pollution from fertilizers and pesticides used in farming contaminate water sources and cause erosion and soil degradation that make land unfit for growing crops. Runoff pollution also hurts tourism and recreation business by damaging streams, rivers and lakes around the state — including the mega-tourism and recreation attraction, Lake Michigan. All other businesses are also vulnerable to water pollution: All need a healthy workforce, healthy customers and an uncontaminated supply chain to survive.



Non-point runoff pollution (from a combination of agricultural, industrial, and urban sources) is the biggest source of water pollution in Illinois. When a body of water is too polluted for human use, it is labeled as an “impaired” body of water. In 2012, the EPA found over 9,600 miles of rivers and streams and over 144,000 acres of lakes, reservoirs, and ponds were rated as impaired in Illinois.

Illinois businesses include the 75,000+ downstate farms employing 200,000 people and generating over \$70 billion a year. Most (75 percent) of Illinois’ land is devoted to corn, soybeans, pork and other agricultural production. All of Illinois’ farms rely on the state’s rivers and lakes for water. Farming-related businesses are also affected, including 2800+ food processing-related companies that make Illinois #1 in the U.S. with \$180 billion in processed food sales.

Other industries damaged by runoff are tourism/recreation and commercial fishing, especially along Lake Michigan’s 63-mile coast in Illinois. The area houses six million residents in Chicago and surrounding communities and provides drinking water for seven million. Twenty million people visit the area each year; recreation, including boating, fishing and swimming generate \$3.2 billion yearly and support 33,000 jobs.¹

Economists agree that tourism/recreation and commercial fishing depend heavily on the health of the Great Lakes. Every Great Lakes restoration dollar creates three dollars in economic impact for Great Lakes states.²

An enormous, diverse array of Illinois businesses are at serious risk or are already compromised by runoff pollution — and so are their millions of workers and families.

To safeguard our economy and overall wellbeing, Illinois must make it a priority to:

- **Reform crop insurance programs** to incentivize cover crops. In Illinois, 82% of nitrogen and 48% of phosphorous pollution comes from non-point sources, especially agriculture. Cover crops can help filter and recycle these pollutants, guarding against soil erosion and other damage, but cover crops are used on only 2% of agricultural land in the massive Mississippi River Basin. Current crop insurance programs actually dis-incentivize cover crops by putting difficult-to-meet guidelines on crop

termination dates. Many farmers throughout the Corn Belt indicate they would be more willing to plant cover crops if cost-sharing assistance at a modest \$23 per acre were available.

Studies show that including cover crops in corn and soybean crop rotations reduce nitrate leaching into water by up to 50%. Offering farmers tax deductions, subsidies or other incentives to plant cover crops would reduce runoff pollution and preserve the long-term viability of our valuable water and soil.

- **Support federal tax credits** for farmers who divert runoff water away from streams. USDA research has found that slowing runoff and rerouting it into the ground significantly reduces nitrogen flow into larger streams. Farmers should earn tax credits for installing and utilizing pipe-drainage systems that divert runoff. Farmers in the Mississippi River Delta have installed more than 1,000 pipe-drainage systems that collect water runoff on the side of fields. This solution has led to higher crop yields, consistent production, and efficient use and allocation of water.
- **Fulfill the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy** to achieve a 45% overall reduction in the amount of phosphorous and nitrate nitrogen leaving the state to reduce the occurrence of algae blooms in water bodies within the state and in the Gulf of Mexico. Implementation of the Strategy requires investments in wastewater treatment upgrades and best management practices for urban and agricultural runoff.

Robust agriculture in Illinois is essential to the state and the nation, but agriculture also plays a major role in contaminating water quality throughout the Mississippi River Basin. Illinois is the source of 20% of the agricultural runoff that ends up in the Gulf of Mexico, which costs the Gulf area’s seafood industry \$82 million a year and raises costs for Illinois and the rest of the country. Farming itself is also endangered by runoff pollution that erodes and contaminates soil. In advance of eventual regulation and potential selectivity in federal grant awards, Illinois should develop numeric criteria for nitrogen and phosphorous levels as part of a demonstrable control program. Our farms and economy will both be healthier for it. ★

¹ <http://chicagotonight.wttw.com/sites/default/files/article/file-attachments/Great%20Lakes%20Restoration%20Initiative%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

² <http://greatlakesecho.org/2015/09/09/great-lakes-water-grows-economy/>



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