

Landscape design and management issues have heated up in Iowa. In March, the Des Moines Water Works (DWW) filed a Federal suit against three counties over nutrient runoff from agricultural drainage districts. The suit alleges that agricultural runoff is contributing to high nitrate levels in the Raccoon River requiring the DWW to increase expenditures for potable water treatment. The DWW states that if the situation is not corrected, plant upgrades costing up to \$70 million will be necessary. Groups are lining up on both sides of this issue: those in support of the lawsuit, and those in support of agricultural interests and solutions that avoid legal action and costly and intrusive new regulations. The DWW contends that voluntary efforts to ameliorate this issue have not worked, and that regulations need to be applied. Agricultural interests contend that voluntary efforts have shown improvement and offer significant promise, but need additional time and funding to accelerate that progress and propagate conservation practices that will reverse this trend.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently told The Des Moines Register's editorial board that "A 'holistic' conservation approach to curbing fertilizer runoff polluting Iowa and U.S. streams will work quicker than litigation." Secretary Vilsack also made the following statements: "... he sees Iowa farmers building conservation practices, ... <and> putting four million acres in federal conservation programs." Vilsack said the federal agency is funding research that provides more insight 'about the biology and biochemistry of nutrient application, runoff and water quality.' It will help farmers and officials to 'better measure what's happening in the soil' and craft better responses. "'It's all extraordinarily complex,' he said."

Additional background and reporting on this developing situation can be found at the links below:

[Water Works votes to sue 3 counties over nitrates \(January 9, 2015\)](#)

[Will Des Moines water lawsuit change farming rules? \(January 19, 2015\)](#)

[Advocacy group touts buffer zones to reduce pollution \(February 3, 2015\)](#)

[Most Iowans support water pollution lawsuit, poll says \(February 26, 2015\)](#)

[Nitrates Draw Scrutiny: Lawsuit threat highlights water management concerns \(March 2, 2015\)](#)

[Vote planned Tuesday on Water Works lawsuit \(March 10, 2015\)](#)

[Water quality advocates encourage Water Works suit \(March 11, 2015\)](#)

[In the cross hairs: Iowa farmers frustrated by water lawsuit \(March 11, 2015\)](#)

[Water Works votes to sue 3 Iowa counties over nitrates \(March 11, 2015\)](#)

[Water Works requests damages in federal suit \(March 16, 2015\)](#)

[DNR leader: Enforcement difficult if water lawsuit is successful \(March 17, 2015\)](#)

[Sides line up in Des Moines Water Works' nitrate lawsuit \(April 2, 2015\)](#)