**IMPORTANT NOTE:** This information is **not to be released or distributed until 10 a.m. Central Time on October 14, 2015**. A photo to accompany this story appears on page 2.

**Gulf’s ‘Dead Zone’ Receives a D Grade in the**

**New Mississippi River Watershed Report Card**

The newly released [Report Card](http://www.americaswatershed.org/reportcard) produced by [America’s Watershed Initiative](mailto:http://americaswatershed.org/) (AWI) includes key information about the hypoxic or “dead” zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Overall, coastal wetlands received a D grade in the Report Card.

The hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico forms every summer because of excess nutrients from throughout the watershed delivered to the Gulf by the Mississippi River and seasonal reduced mixing of waters in the Gulf. Nutrients (primarily nitrogen) from farms, urban areas, and wastewater enters streams and rivers through stormwater runoff. Fertilizers applied to crops and lawns and treated and un-treated wastewater are common sources of nitrogen. These nutrients fuel the growth of algae. When the algae die and decompose, oxygen dissolved in the water is depleted, which creates a large area of low oxygen (hypoxic) water. This area is popularly referred to as a “dead zone” because the lack of oxygen in the water prevents most animals from living there. Reducing nutrients in runoff and wastewater in the watershed will reduce the size of the algae bloom and the subsequent area of the dead zone.

The size of the hypoxic zone is measured every summer and is an important indicator of how much progress is being made to reduce nutrient inputs into the Gulf of Mexico. The size of the zone is also influenced by other factors, such as droughts or hurricanes that can reduce the size of the zone, or floods that can increase the size.

The [Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Nutrient (Hypoxia) Task Force](http://www2.epa.gov/ms-htf) was created with participation from the federal, state and tribal governments active in the Mississippi Watershed to coordinate activities to reduce the size of the Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

The complete analysis for Gulf of Mexico’s hypoxic zone in the Report Card—along with information about coastal wetlands—is available online at [AmericasWatershed.org/ReportCard](http://www.AmericasWatershed.org/ReportCard). The online information includes grades for each of the five sub-basins within the Mississippi River Watershed as well as six goals measured in the Report Card: the economy, ecosystem health, water supply, transportation, recreation and flood control and risk reduction. The online Report Card also includes for each goal information concerning what was measured and how it was evaluated.

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