

**Louisiana Hypoxia Working Group
Room 1197 Energy, Coast, & Environment Building
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803**

January 29, 2026

Ms. Katie Flahive
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
c/o Gulf of America Hypoxia Task Force

Dear Ms. Flahive,

I am submitting the following comments for the Gulf Hypoxia Task Force Meeting scheduled for February 5, 2026 on behalf of the Louisiana Hypoxia Working Group. The Group is a public forum focused on promoting and supporting the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan in Louisiana and upstream. We have met every month since 2003, and remain the only open and consistent public outreach effort on the Gulf Hypoxia issue in Louisiana.

The Gulf Hypoxia Task Force and the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan have brought together 12 States along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, federal partner agencies, Land Grant Universities, and stakeholders for over 25 years in a cooperative effort focused on voluntary, cost-effective activities, programs, and projects.

The current version of the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan (2015) includes two main components:

Achieving an Interim Target 20% reduction in loading of Nitrogen and Phosphorus from the Mississippi-Atchafalaya River Basin by the year 2025; and

Attaining the Coastal Goal of an average annual size (aerial extent) of the Gulf Hypoxic Zone of 5000 square kilometers/1950 square miles (on a five-year basis) by the year 2035.

We are currently in the window in which actions and activities must be taken to reach the 2035 goal. The February 2026 meeting of the Gulf Hypoxia Task Force (HTF) is therefore an especially important one, as the first public meeting of the HTF in over a year, and the first HTF meeting of the current administration.

In our meetings and discussions, a consistent priority has been expressed: the need to provide adequate resources for reaching the Action Plan's 2035 Goal. This includes key areas in need of continued and increased funding:

- 1) On the state level, the Gulf Hypoxia Program developed by EPA to utilize funds allocated in the 2022 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) needs continued, and if possible, increased funding. The initial amount of funding from the BIL (\$60 million divided between the 12 States, along with Tribes and Sub-basin Committees over 5 years)

Louisiana Hypoxia Working Group – Comments to HTF Meeting 2/5/26 - 2

was modest but critically important – and represents the first direct funding from Congress to the HTF States in the entire life of the Action Plan. Therefore, increasing its funding should be a baseline priority.

- 2) On the basin level, the Conservation Programs and Landscape Initiatives in the U.S. Farm Bill have provided the primary tools for activities in the agricultural sector that can help achieve the nutrient reduction levels necessary to attain the Action Plan’s goals. The next Farm Bill is overdue, and should be seen by the HTF as a priority vehicle for its engagement, with adequate conservation funding directed to this and other national goals.

There are a number of other federal programs that fund watershed and wetland conservation, protection, and restoration that also play a critical part in helping to implement the Action Plan, such as the National Wildlife Refuge System along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers and their tributaries, and the Upper and Lower Mississippi River Restoration Programs, among others.

- 3) The annual Gulf Hypoxia Mapping Cruise conducted by Louisiana State University and the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium continues to provide the data that serves as the key metric for measuring attainment of the 2035 Goal, as well as the general trend of hypoxia in the Northern Gulf, and has delivered this long-term benefit for an extremely modest amount of funds. Its continuing funding through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at adequate levels should be understood as a key priority by the HTF.
- 4) Finally, the Action Plan itself has never been fully funded, and its inclusion as part of the President’s Budget would help rectify that situation, in addition to helping to ensure that the Action Plan’s goals are reached following a multi-decade process of collaboration and engagement by the agencies and states involved. A number of stakeholder groups in the basin have been promoting this idea in outreach to the administration, and deserve the HTF’s support.

We welcome the opportunity to submit these comments and will continue to work in support of the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan in Louisiana and upstream.

Sincerely,

Doug Daigle
Coordinator

Louisiana Hypoxia Working Group

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