



TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy
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That's the signpost up ahead—your next stop, the “[Dead Zone](#)”

You're traveling down the Mississippi River, a waterway not only of sight and sound but also of sediment. You're embarking on a journey into a nutrient rich land whose boundaries are not imagination, unfortunately. The Gulf of Mexico is your signpost, your next stop, the “[Dead Zone](#).” This somber term refers to [a hypoxic zone](#), an area in a water body with low dissolved oxygen levels. It is called a “dead zone” because these areas cannot sustain fish, shellfish, corals, and other aquatic life populations, usually known to be seen in the Gulf. The largest of these in the United States (and [the second largest in the world](#)) forms each summer in the Gulf of Mexico between Texas and Louisiana. As the river moves south, it [collects sediment, fresh water, and nutrients from the one-million-square-mile drainage basin](#). For example, [excess nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorous](#), used heavily for farming in the basin, can run off into [waterways](#), leading to high levels of nutrients in the river and, subsequently, the Gulf of Mexico. This is very important for Louisiana as it sits at the southern end of the Mississippi River.

The state of Louisiana recently published a draft of the [2024 Louisiana Nutrient Reduction and Management Strategy](#). This document updates the 2014 management strategy, which addresses the state's water quality protection, improvement, and restoration goals within Louisiana's water bodies. The strategy document focuses on six [Key Implementation Areas](#): Nonpoint Source Management, Point Source Management, Incentives, Leveraging Opportunities, Science-based Technology, and River Diversions.

However, stakeholders in Louisiana provided [feedback and critique of the 2024 updates](#), highlighting that the document, though lengthy, was largely a repeat of previous management strategies and did not adequately report the progress of nutrient reduction from 2014 to the present. Other commenters pointed out the strategy failed to include language demanding that other states in the Mississippi River basin contribute to reducing nutrients in the river. Additionally, stakeholders at an [Institute](#) you know and love (at least tolerate), [remarked](#) that the report's emphasis on the use of diversions to reduce nutrients is “simply untenable” due to the Governor's recent statements that the [Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion](#) should be [scrapped or dramatically changed](#). The Institute concludes that the nutrient reduction targets indicated in the report are unrealistic until Louisiana makes the targets a priority and “forces the issue with upstream states and the federal government.”

The Interagency Strategy Team is reviewing the public comments, but it's anyone's guess if there will be meaningful changes from the draft management strategy to its final form. Given the issue's importance and persistence, it's clear that a lot more work needs to reduce nutrient loading in the Mississippi River Basin.

[Water, Water Everywhere? Or Maybe Not...](#)

In the past decade, Florida saw rapid population increases. According to the [U-Haul Growth Index](#) (yes, that is a thing), [Florida](#) came in fourth for the most movers in 2024 and is one of the fastest-growing states in the US. [As of April 2024](#), it had a population of 23 million, growing roughly 350,000 to 375,000 residents every year over the past decade. With population growth comes new development, industry, and, you guessed it, increased water usage. Plus, all those golf courses. Yet the question remains—is there enough water to support this population growth?

Well, it turns out that even in the rainy Florida peninsula, rapid [climate change paired with a development boom and overuse groundwater resources](#) has “catalyzed a looming water supply shortage.” The dwindling freshwater in the state and the water salination due to rising sea levels have created a situation where there may not be enough clean water for those who currently live there and those who are moving to the state. [The Floridan aquifer](#), the natural freshwater reservoir that supplies most of the state, is not replenishing adequately due to over-extraction. As the aquifer depletes, the danger of saltwater intrusion rises, and Florida’s primary source of usable water [could be contaminated](#). The article notes that Florida’s groundwater supply [accounts for 64% of Florida’s freshwater](#), is the primary source of drinking water for Floridians, and is vital for irrigation and power generation.

Rapid population growth and unchecked development can strain water resources in water-rich states. This begs the question: When will states start considering water supply impacts before approving development plans and not just leaving them as secondary questions?

Coming Up:

[Tulane Environmental Law Summit](#)
March 28-29, 2025

[Water in Americas’ Human Landscapes: Tulane Law & Policy Symposium](#)
June 16-18, 2025

Water jobs:

[Research Associate \(2025-27\)](#); Environmental Law Institute; Washington, DC

[Program Manager, Adaptation and Resilience](#); Climate Works Foundation; US (Remote)

[Programme Management Officer](#); UN Environment Program; Paris, France



The [Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy](#) is a program of the Tulane University Law School. The Institute is dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of the vital role that water plays in our society and of the importance of the legal and policy framework that shapes the uses and legal stewardship of water.

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