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About The Writer

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Just What you Need: More Help From EPA

Posted on May 18, 2010 at 12:10 PM

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On April 15, 2010 - Income Tax Day, if you have forgotten - your friends at EPA were hosting a conference in Washington, D.C. designed to control even more of your life beyond just the payment of taxes.

EPA hosted a high minded conference entitled "Coming Together for Clean Water," strongly suggesting all the water in the nation is dirty.

EPA wants to develop "healthy watersheds." Speakers included many high powered personalities such as the Secretary of California's Department of Food and Agriculture and to my surprise, the Director of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

When groups such as these get together, agriculture is generally their target and this meeting was no different. Theme no. 1 of this conference was how to restore "degraded waters:" and how to prevent future impairment.

The first topic was to focus on agricultural and silvicultural (forestry) runoff. The second area of focus was stormwater discharges from urban and suburban development. EPA claims there are 43,000 impaired water bodies in the United States and of course, without EPA control, there is no effective solution.

I suspect many of you reading this column were not even aware of this EPA conference supported by your tax dollars at one of the most expensive hotels in Washington, D.C. (There is no shortage of money at EPA* when you can hold meetings at the Grand Hyatt Hotel.)

'High priority' EPA claims excess nutrients are and will continue to be a "...major concern and high priority for action..." EPA also says the amount of nutrients entering the nation's waters "...has dramatically escalated over the past 50 years, and nutrients now pose significant water quality and public health concerns..." EPA believes there are over 15,000 nutrient-related impairment listings in 49 states.

It is amazing that with the practice of mold board plowing virtually disappearing, and a large number of operations using precision farming and GPS which cuts down on runoff and nutrients, that there has been a 'dramatic escalation.'

Agriculture obviously continues to be a major target for EPA and its allies. EPA has been very successful in controlling pollutants from point sources and now it wants to turn its attention to those of us who produce America's fiber, food and fuel.

Bad timing EPA sought comments from those interested in protecting the nation's waters. Farmers may have wanted to comment, except many were in the middle of spring planting. While you were busy readying your planting equipment, many of the participants at the EPA conference saw what you are doing "...as a source of much pollution from both soil nutrients and manure runoff."

In fact participants at the conference thought that one topic should dominate the discussion, and this topic was nutrients from agriculture! The summary does say that some at the conference came to agriculture's defense but most claim that large scale farms "...operate much like any other factory or business and produce similar or even greater amounts of pollution, yet are not regulated as stringently."

An online discussion raised some interesting ways to control your farming

operations, such as banning raw application of manure as a fertilizer and regulating the distribution of manure.

There were some good suggestions too, such as better organization of jurisdictional activities and using incentives rather than enforcement to assist producers.

In the end, however, the meeting appears to me to have had a clear message. If you have followed some of my earlier columns you will see that agriculture and how it is practiced is an obvious target for control by our friends at EPA.

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