



# TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy

Authors: Haley Gentry, Christopher Dalbom, Mark Davis, & Katie Moreland

August 8, 2025

## Something in the Water

The Des Moines River is the largest river flowing across Iowa, which eventually feeds directly into the Mississippi River. The Des Moines River and its tributary, the Raccoon River, [supply drinking](#) water to more than 500,000 Central Iowans; however, upstream agriculture and urban land use practices are threatening water quality and quantity. Because of this, a two-year [study was conducted](#) to summarize important existing and emerging research, identify gaps in knowledge, and provide recommendations for a healthier river. On Monday night, [the first public panel](#) of the report was held.

According to the [Central Iowa Source Water Research Assessment \(CISWRA\)](#), the Des Moines and Raccoon River Watersheds are under threat from nitrogen, bacteria from animal and human waste, pesticides, and other pollutants. One of the biggest contributors to the water quality concerns is Iowa's agricultural industry. The Des Moines River drains some of the most productive farmland in the United States—[nearly 75% of the basin is cropland](#). Iowa is also the [top producer](#) of hogs in the U.S., producing one-third of the national supply. However, the study found that in the Des Moines River, around 54% of nitrogen and around 70% of phosphorus comes from farm fertilizer and manure. Although naturally occurring, when there are high concentrations of these nutrients in streams, lakes and rivers, they can contribute to [harmful algal blooms](#) and [put human health at risk](#). One of study's scientists indicated that "the intensification of the industrialized agriculture, the transformation of the land, the intensity for which we farm is all a part of that issue."

Underscoring the importance of this issue, this study's release coincided with a [ban on using water](#) for lawns, washing cars, and filling swimming pools. For over a month, hundreds of thousands of people in central Iowa were affected as nitrate levels in the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers spiked far above the [EPA's 10 milligrams per liter limit](#), and additional water was needed to filter and process out the nitrate.

The CISWRA outlines 25 steps that should be taken at the regional, state, and individual levels to create cleaner waterways, including allocating more state dollars to wastewater treatment systems, encouraging the restoration of freshwater ecosystems, and reducing solid waste inputs and discouraging litter. And the Iowans agree and demand more. At the Monday public meeting, [hundreds attended](#) in person and online, calling for new agricultural pollution regulations, voicing disapproval of funding cuts to water quality monitoring systems, and [warning about the rising cancer rates](#) in the state; which [nitrates may](#) be contributing to. The strong public response to the study shows that there's political will to see the water quality increase. As one attendee noted, "I truly believe that there is something in the water and I want something done about it."

## **One in Million Dollars? No, Billions!**

A few states eastward of Iowa, in New Jersey, companies are starting to pay for PFAS pollution. This week, the new Jersey Attorney General and the commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection [announced](#) the proposed [settlement](#), valued at over \$2 billion, to remedy long-standing contamination stemming from PFAS, also known as “forever chemicals,” as well as other pollutants originating from four industrial sites.

The settlement, heralded as the largest environmental settlement ever achieved by a single state, stemmed from a [2019 complaint](#) alleging that DuPont and related companies were responsible for PFAS contamination at four industrial sites. In the details of the settlement, chemical companies [Chemours, DuPont, and Corteva agreed](#) to pay New Jersey \$875 million over the 25 years to settle claims, fund the cleanup of four former industrial sites, create a remediation fund of up to \$1.2 billion and set aside a reserve of \$475 million to ensure that the cleanup will be completed if any of the companies go bankrupt or default.

This is just the latest settlement in New Jersey. Over the last two years, 3M agreed to pay up to \$450 million, Solvay Specialty Polymers agreed to spend \$393 million to compensate for PFAS contamination, and Arkema, Inc. agreed to settle for \$33.95 million, while guaranteeing \$75 million for a reserve fund. New Jersey is not alone in their victories against PFAS polluting companies, as similar suits [have been settled](#) in Minnesota, Delaware, Michigan, and Ohio. As federal environmental laws and regulations [continue to shift](#), over [250 bills](#) have been introduced in about 36 states this year to address PFAS. With more states step up to plate to protect drinking water, will more companies be on the hook?

---

### Coming Up:

[Women of the Storm: A Screening and Panel Discussion](#); New Orleans, LA; August 27, 2025

### Water jobs:

[Coastal Organizer – Southeast Texas](#); Healthy Gulf; SE Texas (Golden Triangle)

[Communications Director](#); Healthy Gulf; New Orleans or Remote in Gulf states



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.

6325 Freret Street, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
New Orleans, LA 70118  
504-865-5915  
[tulanewater.org](http://tulanewater.org)