



THE WETLANDS INITIATIVE

January 3, 2000

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Committee on Environment and
Natural Resources
Chairman
Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Working Group
WS 13446 SSMC4
1305 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Chairman:

Founded in 1994, The Wetlands Initiative (TWI) is a not-for-profit Illinois corporation dedicated to the restoration of our nation's wetland resources to reduce flood damages, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, provide high quality open space and conduct research and education. Our mission is to restore wetlands in ways that provide environmental and economic benefits to society and to the landowner.

Recently, TWI read about The CENR Hypoxia Working Group's decision to begin to develop an action plan to reduce hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico. TWI believes that nutrient enrichment is one of the most serious water quality problems in Illinois and the United States. As you know, the problem arises from the enormous increase (since the late 1940's) in the use of nitrate fertilizer on cropland and the loss of wetlands needed to treat the nutrient rich runoff. Excessive nutrients adversely affect human health and safety as well as aquatic life. High nitrates in drinking water impair the health of infants and are extremely costly to remove by conventional means.

The Illinois River and its tributaries carry a disproportionately high nitrogen load to the Mississippi River and, ultimately, to the Gulf of Mexico. High nitrogen concentrations found in these waters, and in other water systems throughout the United States, cause significant environmental and economic problems.

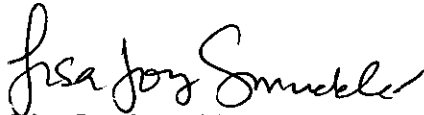
Over the past two years, TWI has developed a restoration concept for the effective removal of excess nutrients. This concept involves restoring wetlands and using the restored landscapes to remove unwanted nitrogen and other contaminants from surface water. This concept is called nitrogen farming. Besides numerous

environmental benefits, the concept potentially offers important economic benefits – income to farmers and low-cost, market-based pollution control. Unlike conventional water treatment systems, nitrogen farming would require little or no fossil energy and, therefore, would be readily self-sustainable. The nitrogen farms would restore many of the natural functions of native landscapes, important functions that have been lost over the last three centuries. Nitrogen farms will trap sediments and remove other contaminants, including some pesticides, reduce flood damages, provide wildlife habitat and create high quality open space and recreational opportunities.

Enclosed, please find a copy of our most recent newsletter that is devoted entirely to the concept of nitrogen farming. Our agency is eager to reduce nitrogen inputs and to restore wetlands and riparian buffers in Illinois and along the Mississippi River. We think that our nitrogen farming strategy complements the CENR's goals for reduction of the hypoxia zone and would like to discuss collaboration with you on this project.

We look forward to your feedback on our nitrogen farming concept.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa Joy Smuckler". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Lisa Joy Smuckler
Director of Development
Enclosure