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US States Around Chesapeake Bay Set Pollution Limits

DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

FALLS CHURCH, Va. (AP)--States around the Chesapeake Bay have set tough limits aimed at reducing nitrogen pollution by nearly 40%, meaning they will have to improve sewage treatment and farm practices.

The new goal cuts tolerable limits of nitrogen to no more than 175 million pounds per year. About 285 million pounds pour into the bay each year from farms, livestock manure, sewage-treatment plants and other sources, according to computer estimates.

When the bay cleanup started in 1983, the waterway was receiving an estimated 338 million pounds of nitrogen annually.

"These are steep reductions," said Chris Conner, a spokesman for the Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program office, which has been organizing the bay cleanup for 20 years.

But environmentalists said the goals don't go far enough to remove the bay from the EPA's dirty-waters list.

"We should be doing the most we can do rather than looking for ways to do less," said Robert M. Ferris, a vice president of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation environmental group.

His group suggested a 160 million-pound nitrogen limit, which the bay program's staff once recommended.

Excess nitrogen spurs algae growth, which then reduces oxygen for fish. The algae also cloud the water, which kills underwater grasses that provide shelter for baby fish and crabs and help to clean the water.

The new goals were approved by a bay program committee headed by Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources W. Tayloe Murphy Jr. The panel, representing Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania, met Friday in Northern Virginia.

West Virginia, New York and Delaware, which also occupy some of the bay's 64,000-square-mile watershed, also have agreed to shoulder some of the burden.

Coupled with other goals to restore wetlands and the bay's disappearing oyster population, the

new limits are expected to cost the six states and federal government \$19 billion over the next eight years.

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