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For media inquiries, contact
  Pam Mackey-Taylor, Chapter Director - 515-277-8868
  Wallace Taylor, Conservation Chair – 319-350-5807
  Carolyn Raffensperger, Past Chair - 515-268-0600

Sierra Club calls on the Governor to issue a moratorium on new confinements and an expansion of existing confinements

Today the Iowa Chapter is calling on Governor Reynolds to issue a moratorium on building new animal confinements and the expansion of existing confinements.

On March 20, 2020, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources issued what it labeled a “Covid-19 Enforcement and Compliance Protocol”. This protocol constitutes a relaxation of environmental regulations and a rejection of its duty to enforce environmental regulations. The DNR statement claims this protocol is based on Governor Reynolds’ public health proclamation of March 17, 2020. The Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club is especially concerned about the DNR’s intention, as it says in the protocol, to “provide some regulatory relief and mitigate the economic effects of business closings and social distancing standards necessary to protect the public’s health.”

Pam Mackey Taylor, Chapter Director, says, “The Sierra Club is concerned that the DNR is placing more importance on reducing regulation than protecting the environment and public health.”

The new policy from the DNR is:
  “I. Double stocking of confinement buildings if producers are required to keep animals on-site longer than scheduled
   A. Producers will be allowed to overstock and not be required to do the following: 1) pay the extra Manure Management Plan (MMP) fees, 2) comply with the construction permitted capacity numbers, or 3) notify the field office of doublestocking.”
B. However, producers will be required to continue to contain all manure and update the MMP if application changes because of the higher levels of manure in the storage structures.

II. Manure application inconsistent with MMP due to doublestocking

A. DNR requests that the MMPs be amended and submitted with the next MMP updates.”

This new policy is flawed. Wally Taylor, conservation chair for the Iowa Chapter, explains “What this new policy means is that the animal feeding operation operator would be allowed to have twice as many animals in the confinement building as permitted, causing increased air emissions which greatly affect the neighbors and increasing the amount of manure that would be excreted. Further, the operator is allowed to apply much more manure on the land, resulting in more manure being applied than is agronomically appropriate. That excess manure will run off the farm fields and into our rivers, streams, and lakes. Not only does that endanger the environment, it also endangers public health. It will lead to more bacteria and microcystin toxins in Iowa’s lakes, which will cause advisories recommending that folks do not swim in the polluted lakes.”

Pam Mackey Taylor, states “There is a high risk that double stocking will create so much waste that the manure-holding structures will overflow, creating more pollution risk to our rivers, streams, and lakes.”

Sierra Club believes that since the DNR’s mission really is to protect the environment, livestock producers should also be told to produce fewer animals so they won’t have to double stock the confinement buildings and apply more manure than the crops can use.

Carolyn Raffensperger, past-chair states “The COVID-19 illness is one that jumped from animals to humans. We know that CAFOs are breeding grounds for viruses and bacteria as well as antibiotic resistant microbes. We risk similar pandemics developing from Iowa’s hog and chicken confinements. This is the time for the governor to issue an order to put a moratorium on CAFOs, not let them violate every basic public health and environmental rule.”

That is why it is time for Governor Reynolds to issue a moratorium on building new animal confinements and the expansion of existing confinements.