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ANKENY, IA—The Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) has released a new report calling for urgent action to address the increased risk of pollution from agricultural lands caused by climate change. The report, entitled *Planning for Extremes*, is the result of a workshop that brought together experts from the United States and Canada to discuss the conservation challenges and environmental threats posed to the Great Lakes ecosystem by upward trends in the frequency and intensity of severe storms.

“Workshop participants agreed that there is growing evidence that the climate of the Great Lakes region is changing in ways that are likely to increase nonpoint source pollution from agricultural watersheds,” said Craig Cox, Executive Director of SWCS. “Participants were particularly concerned that more severe storms could spark a downward spiral caused by self-reinforcing changes in soil erosion, hydrologic cycles, and aquatic ecosystems,” said Cox, “these changes will make our current level of conservation on agricultural lands progressively less protective.”

The report recommends that immediate action be taken to use current conservation practices and programs more effectively by:

- Targeting conservation effort at high-risk tributary watersheds where conservation on agricultural lands will do the most good.
- Focusing more effort on preventing the on set of gully erosion on cropland and on protecting and repairing stream corridors.
- Updating the climatic factors used in conservation planning to reflect the increased frequency of severe storms.

“We think these actions are already needed to deal with existing threats to the Great Lakes,” said Cox, “climate change makes action even more urgent.” The report goes on to recommend additional actions to strengthen the conservation effort on agricultural land including:

- Building a stronger network of technical advisors to work with farmers in the region.
- Creating better tools to predict and manage the risk posed by severe storms at both the field- and watershed-scale.
- Policy reform to ensure long-term commitment to community-driven, watershed-scale projects targeted at high-risk watersheds and to provide farmers with the right incentives to increase their conservation effort.

“We focused this project on the Great Lakes ecosystem because it is so important,” said Cox, “but our recommendations will apply wherever the frequency of severe storms is increasing.”

The project was sponsored by the Joyce Foundation, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, and Natural Resources Canada. The report is available on the SWCS Web site ([www.swcs.org](http://www.swcs.org)).