

# Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Ranking Instructions – FY2011 Northern Plains Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (NPMBHI)

An EQIP application will be ranked and compete within the NPMBHI Funding Pool when it addresses the resource concerns targeted by this Initiative proposal to accelerate implementation of conservation practices to protect migratory bird habitat on working land in the Northern Plains region utilizing the ND Statewide funding pool. An applicant may only provide one Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 EQIP application per operating unit per funding pool.

Note: ONLY financially assisted conservation practices will be considered during the application ranking.

## **Screening Tool:**

Prior to ranking, the application will be “screened” for funding priority. This Screening Tool will set priorities for NPMBHI opportunities for FY11. Check the question that applies to the application. The Priority will be determined and entered into the ProTracts application screen. Maps are called “BreedingDuckPairs.mxd” and located in F:\geodata\project\_data\nrcs\PrairiePotHoleRegion\. Select only one of the following:

“**High**” **priority:** Land has more than 25 breeding duck pairs per square mile or is in the Red River Watershed **AND** resides in a county with greater than 60,000 acres of preventive plant.

“**Medium**” **priority:** Land either has 25 breeding pairs or greater **OR** resides in a county with greater than 60,000 acres of preventive plant.

“**Low**” **priority:** Land does not support 25 breeding pairs per square mile AND does not reside in a county with greater than 60,000 acres of preventive plant.

## **Efficiency Score:**

The Efficiency Score considers the benefits of the cost efficiency of the conservation practice during the evaluation of the applications for funding. This score is generated in the inner-workings or conservation databases and is generated automatically. The Efficiency Score takes values from the CPPE (Conservation Practice Physical Effects) and cost information from the Practice Average Cost Tables in SmartTech. The score evaluates the effect of the financially assisted conservation practice in solving resource concerns.

## **National Priorities Addressed:**

1. *Clean and Abundant Water: Water Quality - Will the proposed project assist the producer to:*  
1a. *Meet regulatory requirements relating to animal feeding operations, or proactively avoid the need for regulatory measures?*

1b. *Reduce sediment, nutrients or pesticides from agricultural operations located within a field that adjoins a designated impaired water body.*

Points will be awarded if the application acreage adjoins a TMDL priority waterbody in the Clean Water Act Sec. 303(d) list, a “Save our Lakes” waterbody, or a wellhead protection area. Wellhead Protection Area Maps are available in Section 1 of the Field Office Technical Guide (hard copy). Refer to the “Save our Lakes” excel spreadsheet that was provided to you. The 303(d) map overlays for streams and lakes are available for field office use. They are located at f:\geodata\hydrography. Choose either tmdl\_streams\_l\_2008\_z(appropriate utm zone).shp or tmdl\_lakes\_a\_2008\_z(appropriate utm zone).shp. These maps may be used as an overlay on the conservation plan map in ArcGIS to determine if the EQIP application meets the criteria.

*1c. Reduce sediment, nutrients or pesticides from agricultural operations located within a field that adjoins a water body?*

Points shall be awarded if the EQIP application is adjacent to a water body and contains practices that will have a positive impact on water quality, either ground or surface water. This question will be "Yes" for applications applying under the Animal Feeding Operations (AFO) statewide resource concern. Points are restricted to the practices listed: 102 CNMP, 313, 329, 340, 345, 351, 442 (only when converting from flood to pivot), 512, 550, 590, 595, 603, and/or 610.

*2. Clean and Abundant Water: Water Conservation - Will the proposed project assist the producer to:*

*2a. Increase groundwater recharge in identified groundwater depletion areas*

<http://water.usgs.gov/oqw/rasa/html/TOC.html>?

There are no designated depleted aquifers in ND. This question is NA in ND

*2b. Conserve water from irrigation system improvements and result in estimated water savings of at least 5% and saved water will be available for other beneficial uses?*

This criterion is not applicable to EQIP applications in North Dakota. This will always be answered "no".

*2c. Conserve water in an area where the applicant participates in a geographically established or watershed-wide project?*

Points will be awarded when the applicant participates in an active EPA-319 sponsored watershed project **AND** applies for water conservation practices within the EQIP application. The list of practices are: 118, 329, 340, 345, 511, 442, 449, 512, 528, 550, 574, and 657.

*3. Clean Air: Treatment of Air Quality from Agricultural Sources - Will the proposed project assist the producer to:*

*3a. Meet regulatory requirements relating to air quality or proactively avoid the need for regulatory measures?*

This criterion is not applicable to EQIP applications in North Dakota, since there are currently no air regulations that apply. This will always be answered "no".

*3b. Reduce green house gases such as methane, nitrous oxide, and volatile organic compounds (VOC)?*

This question will rarely be checked as "Yes." Examples may include reducing horsepower of an irrigation pumping station or the conversion of a diesel or gas motor to an electric/solar motor.

*3c. Increase carbon sequestration?*

Points are awarded when the practices that sequester carbon are part of the application (328, 329, 340, 342, 345, 380, 386, 391, 393, 472, 512, 528 incentive, 550, 612, 650 or 657). Points are restricted to the practices listed.

*4. High Quality, Productive Soils, Erosion Reduction - Will the proposed project assist the producer to:*

*4a. Reduce erosion to tolerable limits (Soil "T")?*

Points will be awarded when the EQIP application includes practices that will conserve soil resources on land that has an estimated benchmark soil loss greater than the tolerable soil loss (T) and a planned soil loss of (T) or less. Points are restricted to the practices listed: 328, 329, 332, 340, 345, 412, 512, 603, 550, 342, and/ or 610. Only select this question as "Yes" if an erosion reduction will be achieved with contracted practice(s). For example: if 340 will be a new practice but T was already achieved do not select "Yes".

*5. Healthy Plant and Animal Communities Wildlife Habitat Conservation - Will the proposed project assist the producer to:*

*5a. Benefit threatened and endangered, at-risk, candidate, or species of concern as identified in a State wildlife plan?*

Points will be awarded if the practices included in the EQIP application will result in protection, restoration, development, or enhancement of grasslands (native or introduced) and/or wetlands for Level 1 Species Habitat. Points are restricted to the practices listed: 382 (cross fence, not protective fence) 390, 511 (645 criteria), 512, 516, 528 incentive, 533, 550, 614, 642, 643, 657, 658, and/or 659.

*5b. Retain wildlife and plant benefits on land exiting the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)?*  
Points shall be awarded if the EQIP application includes new practices that will allow the applicant to utilize the permanent vegetation on land that will expire in the next year or has expired from CRP within the last 2 years and has not already been converted to cropland. Practices might include water developments, fencing, and forage harvest management.

*6. High Quality, Productive Soils, Healthy Plant and Animal Communities: Special Environmental Efforts/Initiatives – Will the proposed project assist the producer to:*

*6a. Eradicate or control noxious or invasive species?*

Points will be awarded when the EQIP application includes practices that will benefit pest management or invasive species management. The intent of the question is to address noxious or invasive species. Therefore noxious or invasive species must be present, identified and addressed through the conservation practice. Points are restricted to the practices listed: 328, 329, 340, 345, 500 (Invasive species scenario), 511, 528 incentive, 595, and/or 643.

*6b. Increase, improve or establish pollinator habitat?*

Points are awarded if any of the following financially assisted practice(s) are applied: 386 (Pollinator Scenarios), 390 (Pollinator Scenarios), 550, 643 (Pollinator Scenarios).

*6c. Implement precision agricultural methods?*

Points will be awarded for 590 (Precision Ag scenario) this is the only eligible practice for this question

*6d. Properly dispose of animal carcasses?*

Points will be awarded when the EQIP application includes practices that will benefit animal carcass management. Points are restricted to the practices listed: 102 CNMP, 313, or 317.

*6e. Implement an Integrated Pest Management plan?*

Points will be awarded when the applicant chooses 595 (IPM Scenario).

*7. Energy Conservation and Renewable Energy Production - Energy Conservation and Renewable Energy Production -Will the proposed project assist the producer to:*

*7a. Reduce energy consumption on the agricultural operation?*

Points will be awarded if the practices included in the EQIP application will result in energy conservation benefits being realized. Points are restricted to the practices listed: 329, 345, 380, 442 (irrigation conversions), 533 (VFD, windmills or solar panels), 590, and/or 595.

*7b. Increase on-farm energy efficiency with more efficient equipment? 533(VFD, windmill, and solar scenarios only), 590 (Precision Ag or SQI), 595 (IPM or SQI).*

*7c. Assist in producing energy from renewable resources (solar, wind, biofuel, etc)? 533 (windmill and solar scenarios only)*

*8. Business Lines – Conservation Implementation Additional Ranking Considerations - Will the proposed project result in:*

*8a. Implementation of all planned conservation practices within three years of contract obligation?*

Points will be awarded when the applicant chooses to schedule all financially assisted practices within 36 months of estimated date of contract obligation.

*8b. Improvement of existing conservation practices or conservation systems already in place at the time the application is accepted, or will complete an existing conservation system?*

Points will be awarded if the planned financially assisted practices will aid in accomplishing a conservation system that the applicant is adopting. If the application will implement practices that are increasing the level of conservation and working towards an RMS, then you would answer yes.

9. Does the applicant meet the following conditions:

*9a. If the applicant has an existing EQIP contract, has it been, and is it now, on schedule and in full compliance?*

Points will be awarded if the applicant has an existing EQIP contract in which a contract item has not been rescheduled more than one time AND the contract holder has no additional contract compliance issues.

*9b. Did the applicant successfully complete any past contract(s) in full compliance?*

Points will be awarded if the applicant had an EQIP(s) that did not have contract items rescheduled more than once AND did not have any additional contract compliance issues.

*9c. Is this the applicant's first EQIP application?*

Points will be awarded if the applicant's previous applications have never been funded. The intent of the question is to award points to those applicants that have never had a contract before regardless of whether they have applied before or not.

### **State Issues Addressed:**

Choose only one of the following questions: either 1, 2, or 3.

*1. Does the application include a complex of three or more wetland types?*

Use the NWI maps to identify the different wetland types in the offer, PEMA, PEMC, or PEMF.

*2. Does the application include a complex of two wetland types?*

Use the NWI maps to identify the different wetland types in the offer, PEMA, PEMC, or PEMF.

*3. Does the application have less than two wetland types?*

Use the NWI maps to identify the different wetland types in the offer, PEMA, PEMC, or PEMF.

Choose only one of the following questions: either 4, 5, 6, or 7.

*4. Does the land in the application support greater than 60 duck pairs per square mile?*

Using the Upland Accessibility by Breeding Duck Pairs in the Prairie Pothole Region Map (Thunderstorm Map) identify if the area will support more than 60 duck pairs which are indicated with either the red, yellow or dark green colors. Maps are located on SharePoint on the Programs site in the Northern Plains Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative folder.

*5. Does the land in the application support between 40-60 duck pairs per square mile?*

Using the Upland Accessibility by Breeding Duck Pairs in the Prairie Pothole Region Map (Thunderstorm Map) identify if the area will support between 40-60 duck pairs which is indicated with the light green color. Maps are located on SharePoint on the Programs site in the Northern Plains Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative folder.

*6. Does the land in the application support between 20-39 duck pairs per square mile?*

Using the Upland Accessibility by Breeding Duck Pairs in the Prairie Pothole Region Map (Thunderstorm Map) identify if the area will support between 20-39 duck pairs which is indicated with the gray color. Maps are located on SharePoint on the Programs site in the Northern Plains Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative folder.

*7. Does the land in the application support less than 20 duck pairs per square mile?*

Using the Upland Accessibility by Breeding Duck Pairs in the Prairie Pothole Region Map (Thunderstorm Map) identify if the area will support less than 20 duck pairs which are indicated with either the light blue or dark blue colors. Maps are located on SharePoint on the Programs site in the Northern Plains Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative folder.

Choose only one of the following questions, either 8 or 9

*8. Does the application support Resource Objective A: Restoring wetlands/grassland qualities to farmed wetlands?*

This would include restoring the wetland hydrology and the cropland being converted to grassland and/or herbaceous cover habitat. Core practices are 644 and 645 and in addition facilitative practices could include 647, 550, 327 or 472.

9. *Does the application support Resource Objective B: Managing wetlands to enhance wildlife and water quality?*

For this question to be answered yes means there would not be any wetland hydrologic restoration. Core practices are 644 and 645 and in addition facilitative practices could include 511, 528, 340, 500 or 472.

Choose only one of the following questions: either 10, 11, 12, or 13.

10. *Does the application provide for greater than 160 acres of connectivity between wetlands in the wetland complex?*

Do not include the acreage of the wetland in determining the acres of connectivity. Only the upland acreage would be used.

11. *Does the application provide for 80-159 acres of connectivity between wetlands in the wetland complex?*

Do not include the acreage of the wetland in determining the acres of connectivity. Only the upland acreage would be used.

12. *Does the application provide for 40-79 acres of connectivity between wetlands in the wetland complex?*

Do not include the acreage of the wetland in determining the acres of connectivity. Only the upland acreage would be used.

13. *Does the application provide less than 40 acres of connectivity between wetlands in the wetland complex?*

Do not include the acreage of the wetland in determining the acres of connectivity. Only the upland acreage would be used.

14. *Does contract include conversion of cropland to grassland to ensure longevity of implemented practices (5 years or greater)?*

The main goal of program is to convert cropland to grassland cover. This question will only receive points when a landuse change from cropland to grassland occurs. Practices installed in the contract would have a minimum life span of at least 5 years.

15. *Does the application acreage include grassland established under an expired CRP contract?*

Points would be awarded if any of the offered acreage includes grassland which had previously been seeded to grass under the Conservation Reserve Program. Expired CRP grassland that has been broke and is now being farmed would not qualify.

### **Local Issues Addressed:**

1. *Does the application provide agricultural working land opportunities to an area that continually experiences wet conditions?*

This would include land that previously was either left idle after the area dried up during the summer/fall or generally was not used for any crop or livestock production after the area dried out.