

Contact:  
Joanna Pope, NRCS Public Affairs Officer  
(402) 437-4123

## NRCS ANNOUNCES NATIONAL WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE IN NEBRASKA

*Agricultural producers located in priority watersheds have until May 3 to apply for assistance.*

LINCOLN, NE, April 3, 2013 — State Conservationist Craig Derickson announced today that the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is currently accepting applications to the National Water Quality Initiative committed to improving four impaired watersheds in eastern Nebraska. NRCS will manage the initiative by making funds available to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners in the selected watersheds.

“NRCS has been working to provide voluntary, incentive-based conservation assistance to Nebraska landowners. That has included working with partner agencies to help landowners and operators improve and protect watershed health. The National Water Quality Initiative will carry on the tradition of this partnership effort that has been highly effective in Nebraska,” Derickson said.

Through this effort, eligible producers in the selected watersheds will invest in voluntary conservation practices to help provide cleaner water for their neighbors and communities. The watersheds were identified with help from state agencies, partners, and the USDA State Technical Committee. The selected watersheds are:

- Cottonwood Creek in Saunders County (area includes Czechland Lake near Prague, Neb.)
- Holmes Creek/Conestoga Reservoir in Seward and Lancaster counties (area includes Conestoga State Recreation Area southwest of Lincoln, Neb.)
- Upper Cub Creek in Jefferson County (area includes Cub Creek Recreation Area northeast of Fairbury, Neb.)
- Big Indian Creek in Gage County (area includes Lower Big Blue Recreation Area south of Blue Springs, Neb.)

Using funds from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, NRCS will provide funding and expertise to producers interested in installing conservation practices such as cover crops, filter strips, terraces, no-till and other erosion control practices to improve water quality.

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Participating in the announcement of the National Water Quality Initiative for Nebraska were representatives from the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, Lower Platte North, Lower Platte South and Lower Big Blue NRDs, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and landowners who farm in the targeted watershed areas.

Ralph Pieke, a farmer and a Lower Platte North NRD board member said in his area, no-till farming has made a big difference in improving water quality.

“No till is a shining example of how to control erosion. If you can catch the water where it falls, you have the battle pretty well won,” Pieke said.

Burdett Piening, a landowner in the Conestoga watershed said terraces are a popular practice in southeast Nebraska. “They do a good job at keeping soil on the field and out of the water,” Piening said.

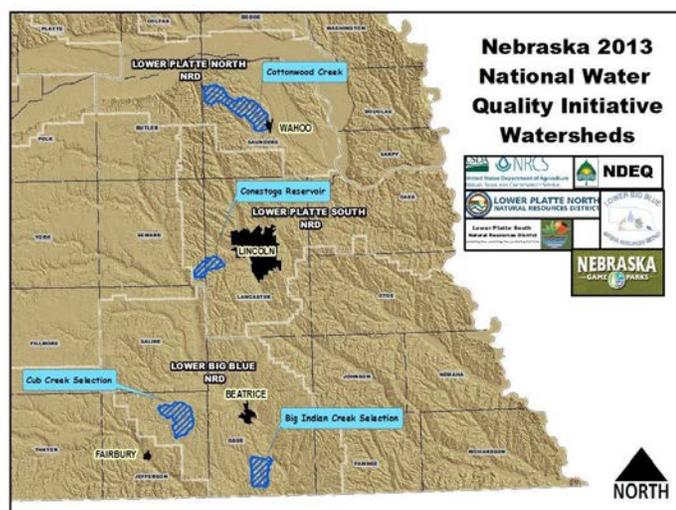
A variety of conservation practices may be installed through the National Water Quality Initiative. NRCS staff will work with individual landowners to develop a conservation plan to apply practices that work best for their farming operation in each particular watershed.

Interested participants may apply for financial assistance through the National Water Quality Initiative on a continuous basis throughout the year. Landowners and operators should check with the local NRCS office to see if their farm or ranch is located in one of the targeted watersheds. All applications for funding consideration, during this fiscal year, must be received by May 3, 2013.

Since 1935, NRCS’ nationwide conservation delivery system works with private landowners to put conservation on the ground based on specific, local conservation needs, while accommodating state and national interests. For more information about NRCS programs, initiatives and services in Nebraska, visit [www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov).

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Note to reporters: A map showing the watersheds eligible for the National Water Quality Initiative funding (*see right*) and a photo of the National Water Quality Initiative Nebraska announcement event (*see next page*) is available by contacting Joanna Pope at (402) 437-4123 or [joanna.pope@ne.usda.gov](mailto:joanna.pope@ne.usda.gov).



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*Attending the announcement of the National Water Quality Initiative for Nebraska included: (Back row L-R) Dennis Schroeder, NRCS; Brad Soncksen, NRCS; Elbert Traylor, NDEQ; Mike Linder, director Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality; Craig Derickson, state conservationist Natural Resources Conservation Service; David Clabaugh, general manager Lower Big Blue NRD; Mark Porath, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission; Patrick Hartman, NDEQ; David Griffith, NRCS; Rich Torpin, NRCS; (Front Row L-R) Ralph Pieke, Lower Platte North NRD board member; Tom Mountford, assistant director Lower Platte North NRD; Paul Zillig, assistant general manager Lower Platte South NRD; Burdett Piening, farmer.*

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