Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI)

Partner Briefing on Status and FY 2012 Funding Opportunities

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

December 22, 2011
Agenda

Introductions and Opening Remarks
David White, Chief NRCS

MRBI Status
Tom Christensen,
Regional Conservationist, NRCS

RFP Review
Myron Taylor, Acting MRBI Coordinator, NRCS

Monitoring and Evaluation
Howard Hankin,
National Aquatic Ecologist NRCS
Martin Lowenfish, Acting Initiatives Team Leader

Questions and Answers
Tom Christensen
Martin Lowenfish
Myron Taylor

Timeline and Next Steps
Myron Taylor

Closing
Tom Christensen
Location of U.S. Cropland
Measuring the Environmental Benefits of Conservation:

Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP)

- CEAP is a multi-agency effort to quantify the environmental effects of conservation practices and programs and develop the science base for managing the agricultural landscape for environmental quality.
- Project findings are used to guide USDA conservation policy and program development and help conservationists, farmers and ranchers make more informed conservation decisions.
**CEAP - Cropland Regional Assessments**

**River Sub-Basin CEAP Reports**

**Published**
- Chesapeake Bay
- Upper Mississippi
- Great Lakes

**Scheduled for release by early 2012**
- Ohio-Tennessee
- Missouri
- Arkansas-White-Red
- Lower Mississippi
- South Atlantic/Gulf
- Northeast
- Texas Gulf
- Pacific Northwest

* This schedule is subject to change due to two forces:
  1. Sometimes reviewers will find items they would like to be considered and NRCS explores them prior to release of a final public document.
  2. The Department determines the timing of the release.
Key Findings of the CEAP Cropland Regional Assessments
(Upper Mississippi, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes)

- The voluntary, incentives-based conservation approach is achieving results.
- Opportunities exist to further reduce sediment and nutrient losses from cropland.
- Comprehensive conservation planning and implementation are essential.
- Targeting enhances effectiveness and efficiency.
- Full treatment of the most vulnerable acres will require a suite of conservation practices.
Key Findings of the CEAP Cropland Regional Assessments
(Upper Mississippi, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes)
2003-2006 Assessment Period

- **Baseline Conservation Practices (percent of cropped acres):**
  - Mulch till or no-till (82-91%)
  - High or moderately high nitrogen management (38-45%)
  - High or moderately high phosphorus management (38-54%)

- **Edge-of-Field Reductions Because of Conservation Practice Use**
  - Sediment (47-61% reduction)
  - Nitrogen (surface) (42-45% reduction)
  - Nitrogen (subsurface) (9-31% reduction)
  - Total Phosphorus (39-44% reduction)

- **Conservation Treatment Needs (percent of cropped acres):**
  - Cropland needing a high level of treatment (19%)
  - Cropland needing high or moderate level of treatment (53-80%)
  - Subsurface Nitrogen Loss (45-62%)
  - Surface Nitrogen Loss (6-24%)
  - Phosphorus Loss (12-51%)
APEX Modeling

- Based on the findings of the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), modeling is needed to augment the limited monitoring programs nationwide.

- Agricultural Policy/Environmental eXtender (APEX) is being used by CEAP in a national effort to assess the effectiveness of conservation practices.

- The model is being used to simulate nutrient, pesticide and sediment losses under conditions of agricultural practices based on farmer surveys from 2003-2006 at selected National Resource Inventory (NRI) sample points.

- NRCS is working to use APEX in characterizing approximately 6 12-digit watersheds within MRBI. This effort to assess the effects of MRBI practice implementation is meant to be complementary to the focused monitoring approach being implemented within MRBI projects.
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

- **Objective**
  - Improve the health of small watersheds within the Mississippi River Basin – connect to agricultural producers and land users on a local level

- **MRBI Priorities**
  - Reduce nutrient runoff
  - Restore and enhance wildlife habitat and wetlands
  - Maintain agricultural productivity

- **MRBI Uses a Systems Approach**
  - Conservation practices are used in combination for greater effectiveness

- **Examples of Conservation Practices**
  - Nutrient management
  - Conservation tillage
  - Cover crops
  - Erosion control structures
  - Waste storage facilities
  - Management of drainage water
Avoiding, Controlling, Trapping

- **Avoiding**
  - Nutrient management
    - Rate, Timing, Form, Method
    - Adaptive nutrient management
  - Residue and tillage management
  - Management of drainage water

- **Controlling**
  - Vegetative buffers
  - Wetlands designed for nutrient removal
  - Bioreactors in tile drainage systems

- **Trapping**
  - Vegetative buffers
  - Wetlands designed for nutrient removal
  - Bioreactors in tile drainage systems
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Target Funding Level – FY 2010 through FY 2013

• Based on project requests, dedicating $80 million in financial assistance each year
  ○ Plus associated technical assistance

• This is in addition to regular NRCS program funding in the 13 Initiative states
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Programs used in MRBI

All are voluntary NRCS Farm Bill Programs

- **Conservation Cooperative Partnership Initiative (CCPI):**
  - Competitive process through which entities submit project proposals
    - **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**
    - **Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)**
    - **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**

- **Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP)**
  - Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**
  - Component of EQIP
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

FY 2010
- 12 States
- 41 Focus Areas

FY 2011
- 13 States added South Dakota
- 43 Focus Areas:
  - Added one in South Dakota
  - Added one in Mississippi

FY 2012
- 13 States
- 54 Focus Areas
  - Added 13 in AR, WI, MN, IA
  - Removed 2 in WI and IL

Funded 12 Digit HUCs
- 95 Funded Projects
  (Projects are smaller watershed areas within the larger Focus Area watersheds)

Geographic Area
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2010 Accomplishments

- More than 700 EQIP, WHIP, and CSP contracts supporting conservation on private lands for over $32.8 million in financial assistance
- 18 WREP projects for over $4 million in financial assistance
- 12 CIG projects for about $2.9 million in financial assistance
- Work being correlated with CEAP report findings
- First year of edge-of-field monitoring has been completed
The 2010 MRBI Report is on the NRCS website and 2011 report should be available soon.
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FY 2011 Accomplishments

• 19 new CCPI and WREP projects approved in June 2011 that provided more than $14.4 million in financial assistance to new project areas
  o CCPI – $9.2 million
  o WREP – $5.2 million
• New contracting continued in the 2010 project areas
  o CCPI - $29 million
  o WREP - $9.4 million
• NRCS collaborated with EPA, USGS, and others on monitoring (collaboration is on-going)
• 8 Conservation Innovation Grants were approved for more than $3.7 million
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FY 2011 EQIP, WHIP, and WREP Financial Assistance Obligations through CCPI and WREP Projects

Total FY 2011 EQIP, CSP, WHIP and WREP MRBI FA Obligated: $50,928,671

- Contracts entered in FY 2011: 1,133
- New acres under contract in FY 2011: 238,074

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<td>$1,166,963</td>
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NOTES:
- These are preliminary REAP data which have NOT yet been certified.
- Includes contracts in MRBI projects (CCPI and WREP) approved in FY 2010 and FY 2011.
- Additional "general" program funds may have also been obligated in these same project areas but are not accounted for in the figures shown above.
- Technical assistance data, were not readily available.
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Fiscal Year 2012

- Focus Areas were evaluated to ensure that they still met the goals and objectives of MRBI
- NRCS State Conservationists, in consultation with their State Technical Committee:
  - Determined if additional areas were needed to address new opportunities and issues, especially agricultural drainage water management (in the Upper Mississippi River Basin), critical water quantity issues (in the Lower Mississippi River Basin), and enhanced nutrient management; and
  - Reviewed the focus areas that have shown little or no activity to pursue MRBI projects to determine if they should be considered for removal from the Initiative.
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Results of Reviews

• No changes: 4 states
  ▪ Indiana
  ▪ Minnesota
  ▪ Ohio
  ▪ South Dakota

• Recommend Removals: 2 states, 3 watersheds
  ▪ Illinois (1)
  ▪ Wisconsin (2)

• Recommend Additions: 8 states, 13 watersheds
  (several are shared watersheds)
  ▪ 5 focus areas for Batture lands effort
    (WREP only; AR, KY, LA, MS, MO, TN)
  ▪ 5 focus areas for water quantity
    (Arkansas)
  ▪ 3 focus areas to replace two removed focus areas (Wisconsin; one shared with Iowa; one shared with Minnesota.)

• Resulting in 54 Focus Areas for FY 2012
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

Fiscal Year 2012

• Projects approved in fiscal years 2010 and 2011 will receive fiscal year 2012 funding up to $65.4 million to award new contracts in those project areas

• A Request for Proposals for MRBI CCPI and WREP will be published in the near future
  • Will allow for new project areas to be identified

• New opportunities and issues have been identified in MRBI:
  • Agricultural drainage water management (in the Upper Mississippi River Basin),
  • Critical water quantity issues (in the Lower Mississippi River Basin)
  • Adaptive nutrient management
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Strategic Watershed Action Teams (SWAT)

- In fiscal year 2011, NRCS provided $4 million for the establishment of SWATS in MRBI ($20 million across 9 initiatives)
- Provide planning and implementation assistance, outreach, etc.
- Helps fill in gaps where NRCS does not have certain disciplines in place
- SWAT staff are not federal employees, but rather partner employees
- Must have partner matching funds
  - MRBI’s $4 million has been matched by more than $2.4 million
- MRBI will have 126 additional full-time equivalents through SWAT (over a three year period)
  - More than 40 full-time equivalents per year for each of three years
- Accounts for the most “boots on the ground” from all the initiatives
- NRCS and partners have 23 agreements signed for MRBI
- Partners include state agencies, county government entities, NGOs, others
Questions?

Follow-up questions can be sent to:

**CCPI or General MRBI:**
- Myron Taylor, Acting MRBI Coordinator
  myron.taylor@mn.usda.gov
- Martin Lowenfish, Acting Initiatives Coordinator
  martin.lowenfish@wdc.usda.gov

**WREP:**
- Jessica Groves, WRP Program Manager
  jessica.groves@wdc.usda.gov

**CIG:**
- Gregorio Cruz, CIG Program Manager
  gregorio.cruz@wdc.usda.gov
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Monitoring and Evaluation

• In order to help assess the environmental outcomes of MRBI work, the Initiative utilizes a three-tiered monitoring and evaluation process:
  o Edge-of-Field
  o In-Stream
  o Watershed Level (Pour Point)

• NRCS can cost-share with land users on the edge-of-field monitoring, but need partners to assist land users with this activity

• NRCS also relies on partners to perform the in-stream and watershed-level monitoring and evaluation

  NRCS has collaborated with EPA, USGS, and others on monitoring and evaluation but needs greater commitments from agencies with this expertise and experience to assist with monitoring and evaluation
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Management of Agricultural Drainage Water

- Foster greater adoption of this management system by implementing strategic actions designed to overcome past barriers and limitations, and capitalize on lessons learned.
  - Not about draining new acres
  - Focus is managing drainage water for improved environmental outcomes and sustaining crop production
  - Use a conservation systems approach – ADWM with nutrient management, conservation tillage, crop rotations, cover crops, etc.
  - Consideration must be given to watershed/landscape context – downstream flow, flooding, groundwater
  - Partnerships and collaboration will be essential – research, demonstration, technical and financial assistance, assessment and evaluation, etc.
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NOTE: This map is Draft and is being refined.
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

Improve the health of the Mississippi River Basin by working with producers to help them voluntarily implement conservation systems which:

- Avoid, control and trap nutrient runoff
- Restore/enhance wildlife habitat
- Maintain agricultural productivity
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- NRCS will dedicate up to $80 million in each of these fiscal years.
- Funding is above regular program funding levels in the MRBI States.
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• Projects that were approved in FY 2010 received FY 2011 CCPI funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and/or FY 2011 Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP).
  – Projects approved in FY 2010 and 2011 that requested future year funding do not need to resubmit a proposal for the same 12-digit project area.
• Funding amounts were 75 percent of what was requested in the project proposal.
• FY 2012 funding being distributed to states totals approximately $57 million.
• Funding must be obligated in producer contracts by July 1, 2012.
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• New MRBI funding opportunities include the following:
  – The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) and Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) RFP for MRBI will be published in the Federal Register in January 2012.
  – The MRBI Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) is a subpart of the national CIG Announcement for Program Funding that will published on grants.gov in January 2012.
Details, details, details…

Please read and follow the guidance provided in the RFP!
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Financial Assistance Funding for Proposals:

• Up to $11.74 million for Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI)
  – A voluntary conservation initiative that enables the use of certain conservation programs, combined with eligible partner resources, to provide technical and financial assistance to landusers to enhance conservation outcomes and achieve resource conservation objectives.

• Up to $25 million for Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP)
  – A component of the Wetlands Reserve Program that leverages partner assistance

• Up to $5 million for Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
Submitting CCPI and WREP Proposals

- Proposals must be received on or before the 2012 cutoff date
- May be submitted via email or the U.S. Postal Service.
  - E-mail submission is highly encouraged.
  - Courier (FedEx, UPS) delivery is not an option.
    - Email boxes have been set up for CCPI and WREP
    - If submitting a paper copy, they are to be mailed to the NRCS NHQ (Martin Lowenfish, Acting Initiatives Coordinator).
    - Email and hard-copy addresses may be found in the RFP.
  - Do not send the same proposal both electronically and to the Post Office Box address; use only one method
- Copy to the appropriate State Conservationist (STC).
  - STCs will review and provide a recommendation to the NRCS Chief to approve or disapprove
Who May Apply

- Federally recognized Indian tribes
- State and local units of government
- Farmer cooperatives
- Producer associations
- Institutions of higher education
- Non-governmental organizations
  - with a history of working with producers to address conservation priorities related to agricultural production and/or non-industrial private forestland

Note: Individual agricultural producers are not an eligible partner entity and may not submit CCPI or WREP proposals. They may, however, participate by applying for program assistance through their local NRCS office in the approved proposal areas.
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

- Must submit separate proposals for CCPI, WREP and CIG.
- MRBI is not a grant program.
  - No technical assistance funds, including for monitoring, will be provided to partners through the MRBI-CCPI, MRBI-WREP or MRBI-CIG agreement.
  - State Conservationist may enter into separate agreements for technical assistance through normal mechanisms.
Watersheds Focus Areas

**FY 2012 Focus Area Watershed Additions:**
- Rush Vermillion (WI & MN)
- Kickapoo (WI)
- Grant-Little Maquoketa (WI & IA)

**Water Quality/Quantity Focus**
- Lower White-Bayou Des Arc (AR)
- Bayou Meto (AR)
- Lower Arkansas (AR)
- Lower White (AR)
- Big (AR)

**Batture Lands – WREP Only**
- Lower Mississippi-Memphis (AR, KY, MO & TN)
- Lower Mississippi-Helena (AR & MS)
- Lower Mississippi-Natchez (LA & MS)
- Lower Mississippi-Baton Rouge (LA)
- Lower Mississippi-Greenville (AR, LA & MS)
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### DESIGNATED FOCUS AREAS FOR THE MRBI FY 2012 (8-DIGIT HUCS), continued

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Watershed Selection

• Proposals must address one or more 12-digit HUC watersheds within a designated 8-digit HUC focus area.
  – Multiple 12-digit HUCs must be contiguous

• 12-digit HUCs list is available on the NRCS MRBI website

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Partners may, through the partnership agreements:

- Facilitate the submission of program applications
- Encourage cooperation and promote innovation
- Provide additional technical and financial assistance
- Recommend tailored practice lists or wetland activities
- Recommend program flexibilities (CCPI)
- Provide other resources, including monitoring and evaluation
CCPI

• FY 2012 financial assistance funding will be made available to eligible producers located within the approved project areas through:
  - EQIP – up to $9 million
  - WHIP – $500,000
  - CSP – 140,000 acres

• CCPI uses the funds, policies, and processes of these programs to deliver assistance to eligible producers to implement approved core and supporting practices, enhancements, and activities under MRBI.

• Partners are not required to provide financial or technical assistance but will receive higher priority consideration.
Selection and Review

State Conservationist will review proposals for:

- Potential cooperation or duplication of efforts
- Adherence to program requirements
- Benefits of implementation
- Local issue or concerns

Provide recommendation to the Chief
MRBI - WREP

• FA Funding Availability: Up to $25 million.

• Enter into multi-year agreements with partners
  – Not to exceed 4 years including Fiscal Year 12

• Target and leverage resources to carry out high priority wetland protection, restoration, and enhancement activities; improve wildlife habitat and water quality

• WREP is a component of WRP
  – Land and landowners must meet all eligibility criteria
  – May enroll in options available under WRP
  – Compensation will be based on WRP values
  – Financial assistance funds delivered directly to landowners who apply for WRP through local NRCS office
  – Acquisition, restoration and management must conform to WRP guidelines
  – Landowners must be able to provide a clear title
MRBI - WREP

- WREP requires partners to contribute a match of:
  - In-kind only contributions of at least 20 percent of the restoration costs,
  - Cash-only contribution of at least 5 percent of the restoration costs, or
  - A combination of in-kind and cash contributions of at least 20 percent of the restoration costs.

- Partners who provide additional financial or technical assistance will receive higher priority consideration even if those activities do not count toward the match contribution.

- Additional non-match FA/TA may be for monitoring or management; acquisition, design or implementation services; outreach; landowner incentives; and others activities.
MRBI - WREP

Landowners must:
• Participate in a project area defined by an approved agreement
• Meet WRP program eligibility requirements
• Protect, restore, or enhance wetlands
• Be evaluated and ranked by NRCS and selected based on most likely to achieve program objectives
• Enroll in a permanent easement, 30-year easement, or 30-year contract (on tribal land only), or 10-year Restoration Agreement

Land must:
• Meet WRP program eligibility requirements
• Be capable of achieving successful, cost-effective restoration
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- NRCS Chief will make final section based on ranking criteria
- Applicant will be notified of selection or non-selection
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Upon proposal selection, NRCS will enter a Partnership Agreement with the requesting partner(s). This agreement will:

**Identify roles of partner(s) and NRCS:**
- Monitoring and evaluation responsibilities
- Format and frequency of reports
- Plan of work
- Project budget
- Project schedule
- Other requirements
Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

- Announcement: January 2012
- Pre-Proposal Application Period Deadline: January 31, 2012
- Applicant Review Notification: February 29, 2012
- Full proposal package to NRCS NHQ by April 6, 2012
- In FY 2012, NRCS is making available up to $5 million to support CIG.
- The maximum award amount for any project will not exceed $1 million. CIG will fund single and multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years.
Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG)

- Applications may be submitted electronically through [www.Grants.gov](http://www.Grants.gov) or [nrcscig@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:nrcscig@wdc.usda.gov)
- Applications may be submitted via USPS at the following address:
  Department of Agriculture
  Natural Resources Conservation Service
  Conservation Innovation Grants Program
  P.O. Box 2890, Room 6227-S
  Washington, D.C. 20013-2890
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

January 3, 2012  Release of Requests for Proposals (CCPI, WREP & CIG)

February 2012  CIG Pre-Proposals Selected

March 19, 2012  Closure of Requests for Proposals

April 2012  Full CIG proposals due

April, 2012  Selection of Project Areas (12-digit HUCs)

May, 2012  Enter into Agreements with Partners in Project Areas, and Conduct signup with Landowners/Producers

All funds obligated by July 1  Obligate funds through Agreements and Contracts; Begin Conservation Practice Implementation
Summary of Changes from the FY 2011 RFP

- Clarified language in many places.
- RFP open period expanded from 60 to 75 days.
- Funding level is up to:
  - $11.4 million for CCPI
  - $25 million for WREP
  - $5 million for CIG.
- Clarified when the projects will start. They must obligate funds in 2012.
- There is now a single point of contact to send the proposals to (Martin Lowenfish) and partners are encouraged to submit electronically.
- WREP has a partner contribution which can include in-kind.
- Project length is now four years instead of five.
CCPI, WREP or CIG Questions?
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

- **Nutrient Management:**
  - Promote adaptive nutrient management strategies to achieve enhanced nutrient management results

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:**
  - Seek options for NRCS monitoring and evaluation practice offerings to include simpler, practical edge-of-field techniques
  - Continue collaboration with EPA, USGS, and others on monitoring and evaluation to compile consistent data that can be used to express outputs towards nutrient reductions within select MRBI small watersheds

- **Outcomes:**
  - Establish clear, achievable, and measurable performance expectations and environmental outcome measures for MRBI
Monitoring and Evaluation
Conservation Practice
Standard 799

• Barriers to Implementation
• Lessons Learned
• What Partners Can Do to Help
Monitoring and Evaluation
Conservation Practice Standard 799

• Purposes of Standard:
  - Provide site specific field data for input into models to predict practice/system performance.
  - Sample and measure practice performance to treat soil, water, air, plant, animal and energy resources.
  - Collect and evaluate data for adaptive management to treat the soil, water, air, plant, animal and energy resources.
Monitoring and Evaluation Practice (799) is available through EQIP to landowner participants for edge-of-field monitoring.

- Landowner concerns:
  - Uneasiness of producer being responsible for the monitoring (i.e. If monitoring doesn’t take place landowner is still responsible under the contract)
  - Participant is responsible for 25-50% of the cost of monitoring
    - Federal to federal matching funding will not work
  - Practice payment is a tax liability for participant
  - Producer is responsible for payments to the partner (who conducts the monitoring)
Monitoring and Evaluation

Barriers to Implementation

- Other Barriers:
  - Concerned about regulatory repercussions if monitoring finds issues
  - Monitoring is limited to only three years under EQIP
  - Baseline data may be problematic and years of sampling may be insufficient
  - Training is needed for NRCS and Partners
Monitoring and Evaluation

Lessons Learned

• Need:
  – To identify monitoring goals (at differing scales) and expectations with NRCS personnel, potential partners and producers
  – Consistent goals and objectives if monitoring results are to be compared across the watershed
  – To provide real-time examples of monitoring, cost lists, type of data collected, record keeping and data storage
  – A data software package for data entry by partners
  – Training for NRCS employees
Monitoring and Evaluation
What Partners Can Do

• If possible, have a monitoring coordinator to ensure monitoring plan is being implemented properly
  – This can increase the probability of a successful project.

• Have a good idea of what should be in the monitoring plan rather than expect NRCS to develop the plan for them

• Provide resources to monitor using a three-tiered approach:
  – Edge-of-field
  – In-stream
  – 12-digit HUC
Edge-of-field Water Quality Monitoring and Evaluation (Continued)

Partners (17 partners – including 9 universities)

- Austin Peay State University
- Arkansas State University, Jonesboro
- Buena Vista University, Storm Lake, Iowa
- Cornell University, Ithaca, New York
- Iowa State University Extension Service
- University of Arkansas
  - Fayetteville
  - Pine Bluff
- University of Louisiana, Monroe
- University of Missouri - Columbia
- Agricultural Research Service
- United States Geological Survey
- Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality
- Dane County Land Conservation Department
- Sauk River Watershed District
- Delaware Soil & Water Conservation District
- Iowa Soybean Association
- The On-Farm Network
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EQIP Contracts Including CPS 799 Fiscal Years 2010 & 2011

- 49 contracts
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative
Thank you for your participation!


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