

National Water Quality Initiative

2018 Progress Report

Farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners recognize water as our Nation's most precious resource. Every day, new producers are stepping up to work hand-in-hand with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to plan and apply practices that improve water quality and strengthen agricultural operations.

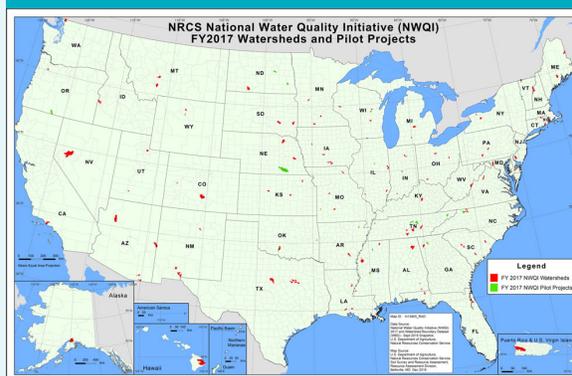
The National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), now in its eighth year, is a partnership among NRCS, state water quality agencies and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to identify and address impaired water bodies through voluntary conservation. NRCS provides targeted funding for financial and technical assistance in small watersheds most in need and where farmers can use conservation practices to make a difference.

Conservation systems include practices that promote soil health, reduce erosion and lessen nutrient runoff, such as filter strips, cover crops, reduced tillage and manure management. These practices not only benefit natural resources but enhance agricultural productivity and profitability by improving soil health and optimizing the use of agricultural inputs.

State water quality agencies and other partners contribute additional resources for watershed planning, implementation and outreach. They also provide resources for monitoring efforts that help track water quality improvements over time.

Based on the success of the FY2017 pilot project, NRCS now has a "readiness" phase to assist states with watershed-level assessment, on-farm planning, and outreach prior to receiving financial assistance for implementation. Technical assistance dollars can be used to support producer workshops, analyze water quality data, conduct GIS analyses, perform stream surveys, aid local coordinators and expand one-on-one planning and outreach with landowners.

FOCUS AREAS



Outcomes and Impacts

As USDA's premiere water quality initiative, NWQI provides a way to accelerate voluntary, on-farm conservation investments and focused water quality monitoring and assessment resources where they can deliver the greatest benefits for clean water.

Program analyses have shown a four-fold increase of acres treated with core water quality practices with NWQI compared to EQIP alone. Average annual funding for conservation practices increased more than 200% in watersheds with NWQI, and twice as many producers were provided assistance in watersheds after they became NWQI watersheds.

Since 2012, NRCS has worked with more than 3,650 producers to adopt conservation practices on more than 825,000 acres in priority watersheds through NWQI.

To date, at least 11 impaired water bodies have been improved and subsequently scheduled for de-listing or otherwise removed from NWQI due to successful water quality improvements.

Water quality monitoring in a tributary stream in southern Iowa



Fiscal Year 2018 National Water Quality Initiative NRCS Financial Assistance (EQIP FA) for Active and Completed Contracts

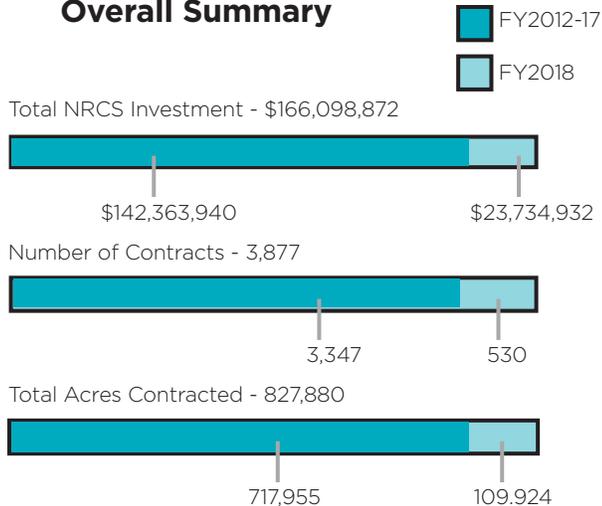
| Region | Acres | NRCS Investment | Contracts |
|--------------|----------------|---------------------|------------|
| Central | 48,472 | \$7,776,079 | 196 |
| Northeast | 10,196 | \$3,335,401 | 65 |
| Southeast | 22,816 | \$7,437,680 | 193 |
| West | 28,440 | \$5,185,772 | 76 |
| Total | 109,924 | \$23,734,932 | 530 |

Data source: NRCS Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division, October 2018.

NRCS Goals

NRCS developed edge-of-field pollutant reduction goals for NWQI to show progress in achieving water quality improvements in these small watersheds. NWQI aims to reduce sediment loss from cropland, across all watersheds, by 772,000 tons, phosphorous loss by 2,052,750 pounds and nitrogen loss by 9,058,800 pounds. These reductions will help to address water quality impairments or concerns identified in each watershed and contribute towards restoring their beneficial use and ecological function. NWQI anticipates that conservation efforts will contribute to the de-listing of up to 10 stream segments from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency list of impaired streams by 2018.

Overall Summary



2018 Milestones:

