

EQIP WaterSMART Initiative (WSI)

FY2021 Progress Report

Managing water resources in the American West can be challenging. Drought, aging infrastructure, and environmental requirements can strain existing resources. Adequate water supplies are fundamental to healthy communities and agricultural landscapes.

NRCS and WaterSMART

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program-WaterSMART Initiative (EQIP-WSI) is a collaborative effort between NRCS and the U.S. Department of Interior's (DOI) Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). Through EQIP-WSI, the agencies coordinate investments in the western U.S. to conserve water and become more resilient to drought impacts.

DOI's WaterSMART (Sustain and Manage America's Resources for Tomorrow) Program is a framework that provides leadership and assistance to help water resource managers stretch and secure water supplies for future generations.

Through WaterSMART, Reclamation leverages Federal and non-Federal funding to support states, tribes, and local entities as they work to increase water supply reliability through investments in existing infrastructure and attention to local water conflicts.

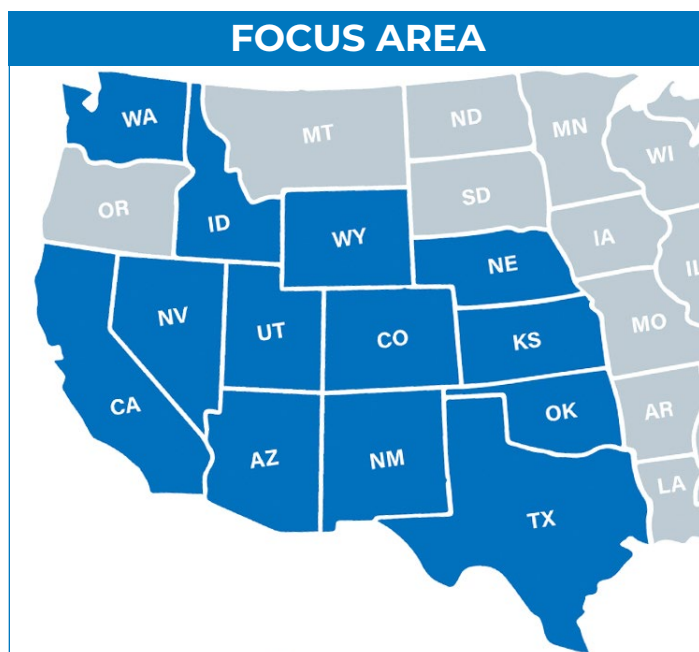
NRCS complements these Reclamation investments by using the EQIP-WSI to target EQIP funds to help farmers and ranchers improve their operations in a way that aligns with a specific WaterSMART funded project. Focusing improvements in the same area aims to increase water conservation and resilience to drought.

Depending on local conditions, some water conservation improvements may also improve soil health; reduce soil erosion, sediment, nutrient, and pathogen losses; protect crop health and productivity; and make using equipment, facilities, and agricultural operations more efficient.

NRCS Focus Area

The EQIP-WSI plays an important role in the National Drought Resilience Partnership because coordination

between NRCS and Reclamation helps communities better prepare for future droughts and reduce the impact of drought events on livelihoods and the economy than independently delivered assistance.



Outcomes and Impacts

The effort began in 2011 with a pilot in California. With the success of the pilot effort, multi-state coordination began in 2016. Between 2016 and 2020, NRCS and Reclamation coordinated to fund complementary investments in 10 different states. The agencies work together to document and publicize the successes of their collaborative results and coordinated efforts.

Beginning in 2020, NRCS has refocused on outcomes, acknowledging that each priority area could have its own unique goals. EQIP-WSI activities in the targeted priority area are now planned and implemented over a multi-year project period to achieve specific goals.

Precision nutrient application conserves water and places necessary plant nutrients where and when needed.



Fiscal Year 2021 EQIP-WSI Financial Assistance

State	Acres	NRCS Investment	Contracts
Arizona	6,129	\$1,354,898	8
California	2,902	\$2,726,419	29
Kansas	167	\$38,172	2
Nebraska	5,106	\$499,735	16
Nevada	435	\$627,442	4
New Mexico	4,066	\$4,321,867	37
Texas	864	\$554,709	21
Utah	2465	\$1,041,841	28
Wyoming	1,240	\$502,026	14
Total	23,374	\$11,667,108	159

Data source: FPAC Economics and Policy Analysis Division, December 2021

NRCS Goals

Starting in 2020, NRCS launched the EQIP-WSI project model to include these defining factors and goals:

- ◆ Priority water resource concerns and practices
- ◆ Project implementation goals for
 - Number of contracts
 - Acres treated
- ◆ Metrics to monitor progress and evaluate final collaborative conservation outcomes in the project area

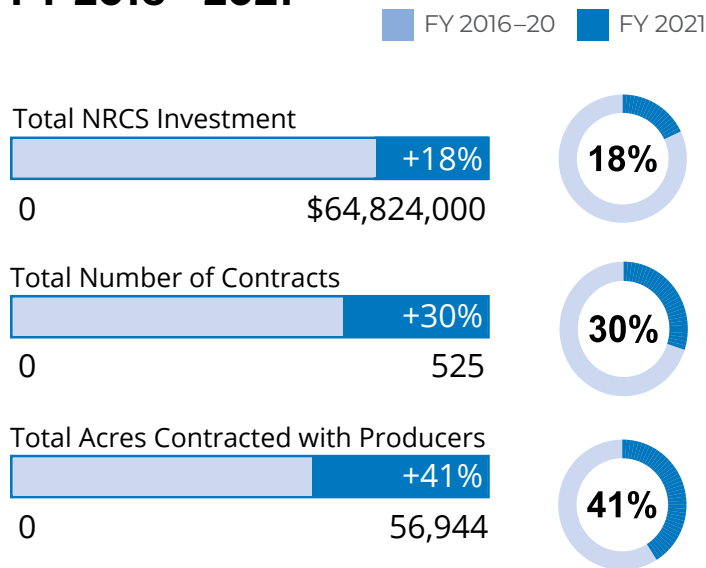
Accomplishments

15 EQIP-WSI priority area projects were selected in FY2021 from 20 multiyear proposals to fund new contracts. All proposals were evaluated for their ability to complement the activities of a specific Reclamation WaterSMART project and to accelerate cumulative water savings or related drought resilience benefits.

Six general types of activities in the Reclamation WaterSMART projects will be complemented by EQIP-WSI activities: water delivery automation and monitoring; canal lining or replacement with pipe; other infrastructure modernization; drought response; stream restoration; and watershed restoration.

The most common agricultural conservation practices supported through EQIP-WSI funding in FY2021 to complement Reclamation's investments include irrigation water management, irrigation water conveyance, structures for water control, cover crops, and sprinkler irrigation systems.

Overall Summary of NRCS Financial Assistance Obligated FY 2016 - 2021



Successful Collaborations

Several examples of successful collaborations over the last five years illustrate the benefits of coordinating water delivery projects funded by Reclamation with irrigation water use efficiency projects funded by NRCS in the same local communities.

The Huntsville Irrigation District project in Utah, Marysville project in Idaho, North Kern Water Storage District, and Tulare Irrigation District projects in California - all used EQIP-WSI funds to improve irrigation water use efficiency on irrigated cropland which complemented savings by irrigation districts funded by Reclamation to reduce spills, leaks, and evaporation losses, and conserved water for use during future drought periods.