

Idaho Bulletin: 300-23-19

Date: June 12, 2023

Subject: LTP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) Watershed and Source Water Protection Area (SWPA) Selection for Planning and Implementation Phase FY 2024

**Action Required By: July 14, 2023**

**Purpose:** To provide Team Leads and Partners with requirements for National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) participation, information about NWQI funding allocations, guidance, and criteria for selecting new NWQI watersheds, submitting justification to withdraw existing NWQI watersheds, and proposing new NWQI source Water Protection Areas (SWPAs) for FY 2024.

**Background:** NWQI, established in 2012, is an initiative under NRCS’s Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), delivered jointly with state water quality agencies (SWQAs) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to address agricultural sources of water pollution, specifically nutrients, sediment, and pathogens in priority watersheds throughout the country. In FY 2017, NWQI piloted a “readiness” phase where states could include watersheds in NWQI and receive technical assistance for conservation planning, outreach, and coordination with partners before receiving financial assistance; this is now the “planning” phase. In FY 2019, NWQI was expanded to include source water protection for ground and surface waters that may not face water pollution challenges that would otherwise make them eligible for NWQI. USDA had previously committed to delivery of NWQI through FY 2023 in the 2018 Farm Bill. In consultation with EPA, NRCS has made the determination to continue implementation of NWQI.

**All states are required to participate in NWQI with a minimum of three watersheds (HUC12) to address impaired or threatened surface waters. SWPAs would be in addition to these three watersheds.**

Idaho currently has five NWQI Implementation Phase Watersheds and 20 in the Planning Phase:

**Implementation Phase Watersheds**

<b>Lower Boise River NWQI</b>	
<b>HUC-12 Code</b>	<b>HUC-12 Name</b>
170501140601	Kuna Butte
170501140602	Coulee Drain-Lake Lowell
170501140704	Lower Sand Hollow
170501140802	Dixie Slough
170501140803	Outlet-Lower Boise

**NWQI & SWPA Planning Phase Watersheds**

<b>Idaho SWCD NWQI/SWPA (FY22)</b>	
<b>HUC-12 Code</b>	<b>HUC-12 Name</b>
170603050801	Shebang Creek
170603050802	Upper Cottonwood Creek
170603060803	Stockney Creek

<b>Nez Perce SWCD NWQI/SWPA (FY22)</b>	
<b>HUC-12 Code</b>	<b>HUC-12 Name</b>
170601030305	Redbird Creek-Snake River (includes Ten Mile Creek)
170601030306	Tammany Creek
170603061307	Lindsay Creek
170603061308	Catholic Creek-Clearwater River (includes Hidden Creek)

<b>Lake Walcott NWQI/SWPA (FY23)</b>	
<b>HUC-12 Code</b>	<b>HUC-12 Name</b>
170402091207	Town of Rupert
170402091302	Snake River-Jackson
170402091303	Spring Creek
170402091304	Snake River-Parees Island
170402091306	Snake River-Burley
170402090505	Town of Max
170402090603	Lower Marsh Creek

**SWPA Planning Phase Watersheds**

<b>Blackfoot SWPA (FY22)</b>	
<b>HUC-12 Code</b>	<b>HUC-12 Name</b>
170402060304	Town of Basalt-Snake River
170402060305	Jensen Lake-Snake River

170402070503	Upper Sand Creek
170402070504	Lower Sand Creek
170402070605	Garden Creek-Blackfoot River
170402070608	Blackfoot River

Each NWQI watershed or SWPA must:

- 1) Have a multi-year implementation plan documenting projected activity and funding needs for the proposed project time frame. Implementation timelines for multi-year projects are valuable because they demonstrate continued commitment to NWQI priorities and invite greater support and assistance from partners. Implementation plans for multiple contiguous watersheds may be combined into a single document. For implementation plans on Idaho’s impaired waters, see <https://www.deq.idaho.gov/water-quality/surface-water/total-maximum-daily-loads/>.
- 2) Have a watershed/SWPA plan or assessment that meets NRCS guidance, which informs project implementation needs. If watersheds/SWPAs are identified as a priority but there is not an assessment(s) or plan(s) that meets NRCS guidance, they may be proposed as planning watersheds/SWPAs. Existing watershed-based plans (e.g., EPA Clean Water Act Section 319) may be used as a foundation to the watershed assessment required for a NWQI implementation watershed (see Attachment A). For information on Idaho source water assessments, see <https://www2.deq.idaho.gov/water/swaonline/search>.

EQIP-NWQI is implemented in priority areas as proposed by Team Leads and local partners, selected by the STC, and submitted to National in a competitive process. National makes the final approval of the NWQIs and SWPAs.

**Explanation.** This bulletin provides criteria and action items to—

- Request new watersheds for the FY 2024 planning and implementation phases of NWQI.
- Request new NWQI SWPAs for either ground or surface public water supplies for planning or implementation phase.
- Request to withdraw current NWQI watersheds or SWPAs.
- Update implementation plans for watersheds that will continue in FYs 2024 to 2028.

**Participation Level:**

- All states and areas are required to participate in NWQI, with a minimum of three planning and/or implementation watersheds (HUC12) that address impaired or threatened surface waters. Implementation and/or planning SWPAs can be included in these three watersheds. States with no current NWQI watersheds may need to utilize the planning phase to develop the components needed for implementation phase activities. Planning watersheds count towards required participation level.
- There is no limit on the number of NWQI watersheds in a state. This provides STCs flexibility to work with partners in selection of watersheds, understanding that states differ in watershed size, complexity, and pollutants of concern. However, effective

implementation of NWQI (i.e., targeted accelerated funding) is expected in NWQI watersheds. Removal of watersheds with low levels of activity could be initiated by annual National Headquarters review.

- STCs should ensure that equity is incorporated in NWQI planning and delivery by leveraging local partnerships including locally led community revitalization or renewal efforts. NRCS should advance inclusive approaches that build the capacity of all communities, particularly underserved communities, to access water quality benefits.

### **Funding:**

- NWQI allocations will be based on the funding need documented in the implementation plans for each state's NWQI projects. In prior years state allocations were limited to the amount needed for the three smallest projects in that state.
- STCs may use EQIP General to support activities outlined in existing NWQI implementation plans where the NWQI allocation is insufficient. In this case, reallocate the funds as needed so they are associated with the "National Water Quality" account type and use the NWQI Ranking Templates and Guidance.
- STCs may also use Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) EQIP to support NWQI implementation plans where those plans include activities consistent with the guidance for IRA funding.

### **Requesting Changes to Watersheds and/or SWPAs:**

- Planning Phase - Planning phase allows for watersheds and SWPAs to be included in NWQI and prepare for the implementation phase. STCs may receive support from NHQ including GIS resources, assessment guidance, and targeting tools that can assist in development of critical source area maps that are required for the implementation phase.
  - Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funding may be provided for activities in the planning phase. STCs may request CTA allocations through the FY 2023 state resource assessment and will be limited to \$50,000 per watershed or SWPA assessment, with a maximum of \$150,000 per state .
    - For example, impaired watersheds with an implementation plan at the HUC8, if eligibility criteria are met, can receive Planning Phase funding to update the implementation plans to the required HUC12 . Once at HUC12, the watershed is eligible for proposal to the Implementation Phase . Use the Watershed Boundary Map at [Watershed Boundaries \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.arcgis.com) to find the desired HUC code/name by zooming in.
- Implementation Phase - Implementation watersheds and SWPAs are those ready to receive financial assistance for implementation. The implementation phase requires completed NRCS watershed/areawide assessments with maps identifying critical source areas and outreach strategies for all watersheds or SWPAs proposed for inclusion.

STCs may request inclusion of SWPAs in NWQI for either ground or surface public drinking water supplies for planning or implementation phase.

- STCs should propose SWPAs based on delineations provided or supported by drinking water partners.

- Proposed SWPAs for NWQI may be located within the high priority areas for source water as provided for in National Instruction (NI) [440-313](#).

STCs can propose to withdraw watersheds and SWPAs from NWQI if treatment goals have been achieved or if factors such as lack of producer engagement indicate treatment goals will not be reached.

**Existing Implementation Watersheds – NEW in FY 2024:**

Using the NWQI Data Call spreadsheet, STCs will evaluate all existing NWQI implementation watersheds to:

- affirm that they wish to continue with implementation,
- document progress made in addressing the conservation needs identified in the watershed assessment, and
- update implementation plans to provide projected activities and financial assistance needs by year for FY 2024 – 2028.

**Watershed Assessment Template:**

“Attachment F – NWQI\_MRBI Watershed Assessment Template” has been added to assist NRCS staff and partners develop new watershed assessments. STCs can choose to use the template to prepare a watershed assessment but are still encouraged to leverage and supplement existing watershed-based plans to meet the requirements for NWQI/SWPA assessments.

**NWQI Map Viewer:**

The link below provides an interactive map of the FY 2023 NWQI implementation and planning watersheds as a reference tool for STCs to view current watersheds that are on the national layer for NWQI: <https://gis-states.sc.egov.usda.gov/portal/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=6396b644a29c4addbe6bd3bb66363f67>

The table below describes the NWQI options and required actions for FY 2024:

<b>NWQI Guidance For:</b>	<b>Determination Needed</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Action Needed</b>
Existing Implementation Watersheds	Is the current assessment still valid and do identified conservation objectives still need to be addressed?	<b>Yes</b>	Complete both tabs on the “NWQI Data Call” spreadsheet (NWQI Budget Data Call and NWQI-Progress Report)
		<b>No</b>	If the watershed assessment is no longer valid but water quality concerns remain, STCs may request to return the watershed to the planning phase. If the watershed meets water quality goals, or there is

			evidence of low producer participation, follow the process for a withdraw.
Requesting new watersheds?	Is there an assessment or plan that meets guidance in attachment A?	<b>Yes</b>	Confirm that watershed meets eligibility criteria (attachment C). If so, complete an implementation plan ( <i>NWQI FY2024 Actions Needed</i> spreadsheet) and checklist (attachment D).
		<b>No</b>	Not eligible for implementation phase. If you want to submit watershed into planning phase, confirm that watershed meets eligibility criteria (attachment C) and complete planning proposal (NWQI FY2024 Actions Needed spreadsheet).
Requesting new SWPAs?	Is there an assessment or plan that meets guidance in attachment B?	<b>Yes</b>	Confirm that watershed meets eligibility criteria (attachment C). If so, complete an implementation plan ( <i>NWQI FY2024 Actions Needed</i> spreadsheet) and checklist (attachment E).
		<b>No</b>	Not eligible for implementation phase. If you want to submit protection area into planning phase, complete planning proposal (NWQI FY2024 Actions Needed spreadsheet).
Request withdrawal of watersheds or SWPAs	Must provide evidence of meeting treatment goals, or evidence of low producer participation.		Complete withdrawal request (NWQI FY2024 Actions Needed spreadsheet) with justifications and include State water quality agency concurrence. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Any NWQI watersheds that are proposed for withdrawal, with concurrence from the state water quality agency, and have instream monitoring can request to retain the NWQI designation and be placed into a “NWQI Monitoring Watershed” category. These watersheds will not receive NWQI funding assistance.

**All required actions as indicated on the table above will be completed using the “NWQI FY2023 Actions Needed” spreadsheet.** This spreadsheet can be downloaded from the [NRCS-Idaho NWQI webpage](#).

**For watersheds or SWPAs proposed for the Implementation Phase, also complete the Watershed Assessment Checklist (Attachment D) or Source Water Assessment Checklist (Attachment E) .** Submit the spreadsheet and checklist (if applicable) to the NRCS-Idaho State Water Quality Specialist .

For a state to receive EQIP-NWQI funding in FY 2024, STCs must submit a proposal and that proposal must be selected for funding.

**The deadline for proposals to the State Office is July 14, 2023.**

Following the receipt of state annual funding allocation letters, states will receive a notification of which EQIP-NWQI areas are approved for FY2024.

**Contact.** If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Maureen Pepper, State Water Quality Specialist, NRCS-Idaho at [maureen.pepper@usda.gov](mailto:maureen.pepper@usda.gov), (208) 378-5723 or (208) 830-0979.

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State Conservationist

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Attachments:

Attachment A - NWQI Watershed Assessment Guidance  
Attachment B - NWQI Source Water Assessment Guidance  
Attachment C - NWQI New Watershed and Source Water Protection Area Selection Criteria  
Attachment D - Watershed Assessment Checklist  
Attachment E - Source Water Protection Assessment Checklist  
Attachment F - NWQI Watershed Assessment Template  
NWQI FY 2024 Actions Needed (Proposal Application)  
NWQI Data Call