

NWQI New Watershed and Source Water Protection Area (SWPA) Selection Criteria

STCs must document State water quality agency (SWQA) or State drinking water partner support for proposed new watersheds or source water protection areas (SWPAs), respectively. On Tribal lands, STCs should consult with the Tribe to determine if the watershed or SWPA meets criteria for selection. STCs requesting to add new watersheds or SWPAs for the NWQI Implementation Phase are required to document the following criteria:

- 1) Water Quality Resource Concerns.
 - i) Watersheds with Surface Water Concerns - STCs should work with SWQAs to identify priority watersheds and must provide evidence that the watershed meets one of the following:
 - (1) Impaired: A stream or water body documented to be impaired and identified on a State's 303(d) list (Integrated Report, Section 5).
 - (2) TMDL: A stream or water body that is considered impaired but removed from the 303(d) list because there is a TMDL plan for implementation (Integrated Report, Section 4a).
 - (3) Threatened: A stream or water body with water quality data documenting an impairment that is not documented in 1) or 2) above.
 - (4) Critical: A stream or waterbody upstream of an impaired segment that is determined by the STC to be a significant contributing source of the downstream impairment.
 - ii) Source Water Protection Areas – STCs should propose SWPAs that meet the following criteria:
 - (1) Addresses agricultural related impacts to water used as a public drinking water supply – surface or ground water systems.
 - (2) Areas based on delineations provided by the State drinking water program or the water utility. Expanded areas will be considered when developed in consultation with the utility/drinking water partner.
- 2) Watershed/SWPA Plans and Goals. There must be an actionable watershed/SWPA assessment (refer to NWQI assessment guidance) that provides the following:
 - i) Sufficient assessment to guide the siting and implementation of conservation practices at the HUC-12 level or within SWPAs for greatest water quality benefit.
 - ii) Identification of critical source areas for identified pollutants of concern (a map showing these areas within the watershed is required).
 - iii) Established goals for water quality improvement, with specific metrics that can establish progress towards these goals.
 - iv) Outreach strategies for implementation on vulnerable acres.
- 3) Technical Capacity and Producer Interest. STCs should consider and demonstrate that there is sufficient technical capacity and producer interest to warrant a long-term investment in the selected watershed or SWPA, using the following questions as a guide:
 - i) Is there adequate technical capacity, from NRCS or partners, to conduct sufficient outreach and technical assistance to meet project goals? For example, is there a watershed coordinator? Does a network of partnering agencies already exist that can carry out identified activities needed to meet goals?
 - ii) Is there sufficient density of producers and producer interest to meet project goals? For example, is there a backlog of EQIP applications in the area and producer engagement in

addressing water quality concerns? Are most, or the majority of, targeted producers EQIP-eligible?

iii) Is there an opportunity for partners to provide in-stream water quality monitoring or other monitoring or measurement that can help track the change in water quality attributed to NWQI practices?

4) Measuring Progress. STCs should prepare for assessing progress toward meeting goals in NWQI watersheds/SWPAs:

- i) When possible, select watersheds or SWPAs where baseline water quality monitoring data already exist.
- ii) Track implementation on the identified critical source areas within the watershed or SWPA.
- iii) Report on the specific metrics that were developed with partner input (2.iii. above) to demonstrate progress in meeting water quality goals. At least one of these interim metrics must be directly related to the water quality concern (e.g., load reduction percentage, pounds of P prevented from leaving field, change in biotic integrity score, change in P index results weighted across the watershed, etc.).