

EQIP-WaterSMART Initiative (WSI)

2023 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.

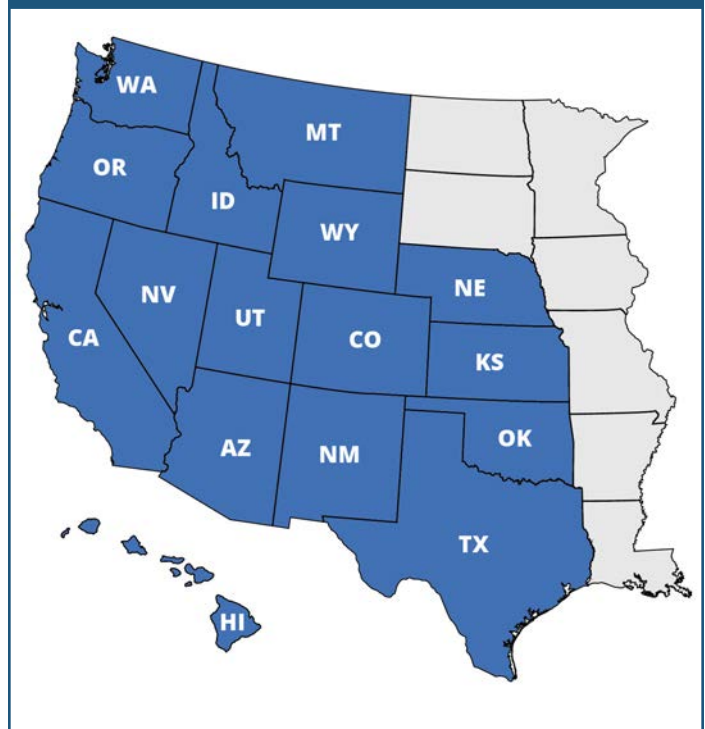
NRCS complements these Reclamation investments by using the EQIP-WSI to target EQIP funds to help farmers and ranchers improve their operations in a way that aligns with a specific WaterSMART funded project. Focusing improvements in the same area aims to increase water conservation and resilience to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

FOCUS AREA



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 2023, NRCS and Reclamation coordinated to fund complementary investments in 14 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.



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 area.

Accomplishments

In addition to the 37 ongoing EQIP-WSI priority area multiyear funding projects, three new ones were selected in FY 2023 from 16 proposals. 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 enable 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 FY 2023 which complement Reclamation’s investments include: irrigation pipeline, sprinkler irrigation systems, micro-irrigation, structures for water control, pumping plant, irrigation ditch lining, and irrigation water management.

Fiscal Year 2023 EQIP-WSI Financial Assistance

Region	Contracts	Obligations	Acres
Arizona	3	\$538,202	188
California	72	\$6,416,772	9,470
Hawaii	1	\$117,478	108
Idaho	18	\$2,733,906	2,398
Kansas	2	\$88,866	152
Nebraska	10	\$236,511	7,470
Nevada	10	\$819,767	576
New Mexico	36	\$3,623,822	7,048
Oklahoma	4	\$70,918	1,533
Texas	6	\$270,827	231
Washington	7	\$721,862	579
Wyoming	13	\$1,429,932	1,414
Total	182	\$17,068,864	31,166

Data source: FPAC-NRCS Economics Policy Analysis Division, December 2023

Overall Summary FY 2016–23

Total NRCS Investment \$98,084,677
 Number of Contracts 866
 Total Acres Contracted 116,895

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.

Producers in the following priority areas used EQIP-WSI funds to improve irrigation water use efficiency on irrigated cropland:

- ◆ [St. John East Irrigation Company priority area in Oneida County, Idaho,](#)
- ◆ [Navajo Agricultural Products Industry area near San Juan County, New Mexico,](#)
- ◆ [Peoa South Bench Canal area in Cache County, Utah, and](#)
- ◆ the Madera Irrigation District area in Madera County, California.

Water conserved through this funding complemented the quantity conserved by irrigation districts with funding provided by Reclamation for reducing spills, leaks, and evaporation losses and increased the total amount of water saved for future drought periods.