Managing water resources in the American West can be challenging. Drought, aging infrastructure, and environmental requirements can strain existing resources. Through NRCS’s WaterSMART Initiative (WSI), we collaborate with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to coordinate investments in priority areas for improving our cumulative impact in water conservation and drought resilience. NRCS and BOR have been coordinating Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and WaterSMART investments since a pilot by California NRCS in 2011.

A Priority Area in Churchill County, Nevada Selected

NRCS selected 15 new priority areas in 13 states, including Nevada, in FY 2022 to receive $21 million in EQIP funding through the WaterSMART Initiative. These investments will help producers on private working lands better conserve water resources in coordination with investments made by water suppliers.

NRCS Nevada’s Fallon Field Office received $500,000 for producer projects. Water stored in Lahontan Reservoir, the source of irrigation water in the Carson Division, is fed by the Carson River and the Truckee Canal via Derby Dam on the Truckee River. The Truckee River terminates in Pyramid Lake and is the spawning ground for Lahontan cutthroat trout. TCID estimates a savings of 3,445 acre feet annually through the conversion to automation of water delivery. With targeted NRCS assistance through EQIP, farmers and ranchers in the EQIP-WSI priority area will have the opportunity to implement more water saving practices such as converting dirt lined ditches to concrete lined ditches, installing irrigation pipeline, leveling irrigated fields, and replacing or installing water control structures. This further helps increase water conservation within the water delivery system, complementing the Reclamation WaterSMart project that was completed in 2015. Other benefits to producers include reduced labor and maintenance. All water conserved through better management by both TCID and producers means less water is needed from the source water which may benefit the Lahontan cutthroat trout.

How Does the WaterSMART Initiative Work?

Private land managers such as farmers and ranchers can leverage money and resources of irrigation districts, water districts, and other organizations with water delivery authority in their community by coordinating their efforts to conserve and use water more efficiently; increasing the production of renewable energy; mitigating future water conflict in areas at a high risk; and other activities that contribute to water supply sustainability in the Western United States.

Through the WaterSMART Initiative, funds are allocated to targeted areas for eligible participants to enter contracts. Each WaterSMART Initiative project area is carrying out different phases of program delivery at the same time—funding, implementation and evaluation.

NRCS and Reclamation, the nation’s largest wholesale water supplier and second largest producer of hydroelectric power, have been coordinating EQIP and WaterSMART

About the Project Area

- 1,528 water righted parcels on over 55,000 irrigated acres
- The primary use of irrigation water is for crops that support the cattle and dairy industries in the Fallon and Fernley area
- Water is primarily used to flood irrigate crops. The major crops are alfalfa and corn with some grain crops

Water Management

In 2020, it was calculated that the District had 18,665 acre feet spill over in the Carson District. Control of such spill overs would leave that much more water stored in Lahontan Reservoir and that much less water that would be supplemented from the Truckee River.

Photo: Lahontan cutthroat trout (photo courtesy Greg Ritland, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)
investments since 2011, the effort began as a pilot in California.

This federal collaboration works to provide states, Tribes, local water management entities, and water users alike with coordinated resources to plan and implement actions which balance water supply and demand through modernizing existing infrastructure, improving agricultural landscapes to conserve water resources and bringing attention to local water conflicts.

How does WSI benefit the public?

By coordinating NRCS’s EQIP and Reclamation’s WaterSMART investments, this federal collaboration works to ensure that water users conserve this vital resource for use during droughts or use by others in the community needing it for clean drinking water or energy, industry, management of wetlands, streams, rivers, and lakes, and other uses. This collaboration is a priority of the National Drought Resilience Partnership.

How does WSI benefit the producers?

Through this initiative, NRCS provides eligible EQIP applicants with the additional resources and tools needed to manage soil moisture, improve irrigation water use efficiency in crop and pasture lands, and protect irrigation water sources from depletion.

In addition, EQIP funding also helps farmers and ranchers improve soil health; reduce soil erosion, sediment, nutrient, and pathogen loss in fields; protect crop health and productivity; and make using equipment, facilities, and agricultural operations more efficient.

WaterSMART Priority Practices

- Irrigation Pipeline
- Irrigation Water Management
- Structure for Water Control
- Irrigation Ditch Lining
- Irrigation Land Leveling

Interested in Participating?

Funding for WaterSMART projects is obtained through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). For more information about EQIP, how to apply and program eligibility, interested Fallon area producers should contact the NRCS Fallon Field Office at: 111 Sheckler Road, Fallon, NV 89406; (775) 423-5124. Producers outside the Fallon area should contact the NRCS field office in the county in which they own land or where they have an agricultural operation.

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