



Hilo Bay Water Quality Initiative Fact Sheet

Pacific Islands Area Overview

Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering financial and technical assistance to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners interested in improving water quality and aquatic habitats in priority watersheds with impaired streams. NRCS will help producers identify conservation practices most relevant to their site-specific concerns. Several conservation practices - including animal waste systems, cover crops, filter strips, and prescribed grazing, have financial assistance available to qualified producers. The initiative builds upon a history of more than 75 years in which NRCS has provided agricultural producers with assistance to implement voluntary conservation practices that protect natural resources while maintaining production and profits.

Hilo Bay Priority Watershed

Nine watersheds draining to Hilo Bay on the Island of Hawaii have been selected as the Pacific Islands Area (PIA) NWQI focal point during Fiscal Year 2015. Most of the approved watersheds contain streams classified as impaired waters, primarily due to high levels of nutrients and turbidity. High nutrient levels have the potential to contaminate groundwater aquifers that serve as the area's drinking water source – a risk that is heightened because of the porous volcanic substrata common throughout the watersheds and its connectivity to groundwater. High turbidity levels may originate where the watersheds' steep-sloped land forms and high rainfall create a high risk for water-induced soil ero-



View of Coconut Island and upland areas of Hilo Bay.

Photo by USDA NRCS.

sion, potentially leading to sediment deposits that smother near-shore corals and other aquatic organisms living in Hilo Bay and its tributaries.

The nine PIA priority watersheds are Kapue Stream, Honoli'i Stream, Wailuku River, Waia`ama Gulch, Waipāhoehoe Gulch, Puumakaala, Olaa Forest, Puna Forest Reserve, and Waiākea Stream. With average annual rainfall amounts as high as 240 inches, a key strategy for improv-

used for cropland, pasture, grazing or timber production – and reflecting approximately 13% of the total area of the watersheds.

Agricultural producers may make significant improvements to water quality conditions – and potentially reverse the impaired waters classifications – by enacting measures to better manage runoff.

Conservation Funding and Practices

NRCS conservation professionals will provide technical assistance to determine which conservation actions will provide the best results to improve water quality on your land. Nutrient management systems, erosion control, conservation tillage, pest management, and buffers systems are just some of the practices being offered as part of the National Water Quality Initiative. As added incentive, financial assistance to share in the cost of these conservation practices is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

The National Water Quality Initiative will work in selected watersheds to help farmers, ranchers and forest landowners improve water quality and aquatic habitats in impaired streams.

ing water quality entails trapping and reducing the amount of nutrients and sediment carried away by rainwater runoff. Recent assessments identify more than 40,000 acres of agricultural land in the watersheds actively

Partnerships

NRCS identified priority watersheds with the help of state water quality agencies and other local, state, and federal partners. NRCS will continue to coordinate with these partners throughout the implementation phase of the initiative, in some cases, finding opportunity to target and leverage additional outside funding. This strategic approach will enable NRCS to provide streamlined assistance in helping individual agricultural producers to reduce the flow of sediment, nutrients and other runoff into impaired waterways.

Producer Benefits

Eligible landowners and farmers participating in the initiative will receive conservation payments for installing conservation practices and working on the land in a sustainable way that provides cleaner water. Additionally, these water quality conservation practices are likely to benefit the agricultural producer by lowering input costs and enhancing the productivity of the land. Across the country, farmers, ranchers and forest landowners are voluntarily taking action and putting conservation on the ground, improving water quality on millions of acres!

Public Benefits

NRCS is proud to be involved in a nationwide effort with landowners and communities to improve and protect our water resources. Conservation investments are good for all Americans because well-managed farms limit pollution from runoff,

produce food and fiber, sustain rural economies, and provide food security to the Nation. Communities benefit by having cleaner waterways, safer drinking water, and healthy habitat for fish and wildlife.

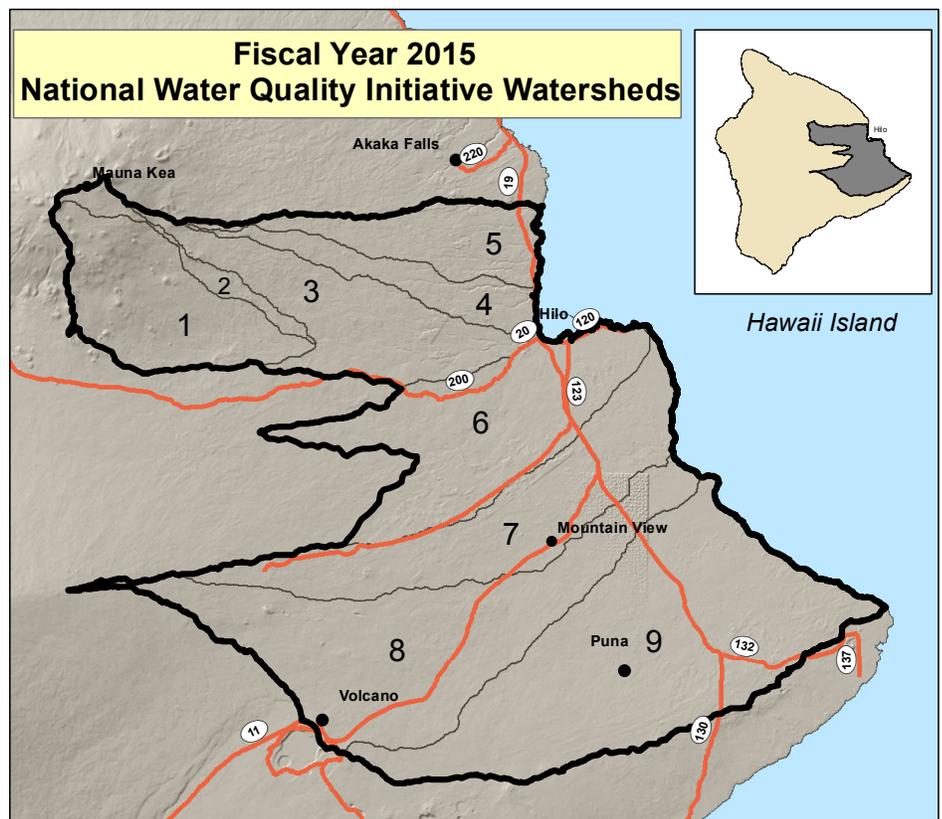
How to Apply

Almost every county in the Nation has a **USDA Service Center**. To get started, make an appointment at your local office. You will need to establish eligibility and farm records for your land. Complete an application and turn it in to the Hilo Field Office. NRCS will help you complete a conservation plan identifying conservation practices that will address your resource concerns and benefit water quality in your watershed. Remember to check with

your local NRCS office to see if you are located in an approved watershed. All applications for funding consideration during fiscal year 2015 must be received by February 20, 2015.

For more Information

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Hilo Bay National Water Quality Initiative project area.

Map by USDA NRCS.