

# Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

Conservation Beyond Boundaries **MRBI**

## Partnering with USDA for Water Quality Solutions

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) created the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) in 2009 to improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat within selected watersheds of a 13-state area in the Mississippi River Basin. After five years of working closely with partners in 124 projects to work toward water quality improvement goals, NRCS is again offering the opportunity to focus conservation assistance in priority watersheds throughout the MRBI area.

### Next Phase of MRBI

In this second phase of MRBI, NRCS and partners will work with farmers and landowners to implement and show the effectiveness of targeted, voluntary conservation systems in priority watersheds. Conservation in MRBI priority watersheds will focus on water quality, while also restoring wetlands, enhancing wildlife habitat, and sustaining agricultural viability in the Mississippi River basin.

### Partnering in MRBI

NRCS is looking for strong partners — such as conservation districts, state and local agencies, universities, commodity groups, and nonprofit organizations — to align priorities and resources to further our conservation mission. NRCS state conservationists, in consultation with partner groups, will propose approximately five small watersheds (at the HUC-12 scale) for focused water quality conservation assistance and

funding. These watersheds will be aligned with state and local priorities, including state nutrient reduction strategies.

Partners can work with NRCS to enhance the effectiveness of this targeted, small watershed approach in a variety of ways, including watershed planning; outreach to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners; providing technical assistance and additional financial assistance; and monitoring progress toward goals in the watershed.

The first five years of MRBI have shown that focused water quality conservation in high priority areas can be effective in building strong partners, increasing trust and partnerships with landowners and farmers, and getting more conservation systems on the ground.

### How MRBI Works

NRCS state conservationists will propose new MRBI priority watersheds by March 13, 2015, with final selections and funding announced in early April 2015. Program funding will be available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). To get involved in new MRBI watersheds, please contact your local state office to find out what areas will be eligible (see listing in next column).

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