



NRCS Announces 2021 Priority Watersheds for Water Quality Initiatives

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Saint Paul, Oct. 14, 2020 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service selected 379 watersheds as higher priority to help agricultural producers improve water quality across the country. Producers in these targeted watersheds will receive focused financial and technical resources through USDA's NRCS two landscape-level water-quality efforts, the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) and National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI).

"We see a positive impact – both here in Minnesota and across the country – when we partner with producers to deliver conservation practices to critical watersheds," said Troy Daniell, NRCS Minnesota State Conservationist. "These focused partnerships allow us to maximize the delivery of our conservation efforts and achieve greater improvements to water quality, which benefits the participating producers, the public, and our nation's natural resources."

NRCS launched [MRBI](#) in 2009 and [NWQI](#) in 2012 to address agricultural contributions to surface waters impaired by nutrients, sediment, and pathogens. Since then, priority watersheds across the country have seen improvements, including the delisting of once impaired streams.

The technical and financial assistance from NRCS assists farmers and ranchers with implementing practices that avoid, control, and trap nutrients and sediment, which can negatively impact water quality. Practices include filter strips, cover crops, and manure management, which promote soil health, reduce erosion, and lesson nutrient runoff.

NRCS strengthened its focus on watershed assessment and partner engagement in priority small watersheds since 2019. NRCS encourages state partners to begin collaboration on MRBI and NWQI priorities for Federal Fiscal Year 2022 which began on October 1, 2021. November 20, 2020 is the first cut off for NRCS Minnesota applications. The Minnesota watersheds eligible for MRBI are Goose Lake and Rush Lake and for NWQI, Whiskey Creek. For the map for more details or see the NRCS website for a full list of the watersheds for MRBI and for NWQI.



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Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

This year, all MRBI-eligible states will have at least one project, with a total of 204 watersheds receiving financial assistance for practice implementation and an additional 72 watersheds in the planning stage. This includes these watersheds in Minnesota:

Here are the MRBI Implementation Watersheds

MN	Goose Lake 070300050203	Rush Lake
MN	Goose Lake 070300050204	Rush Creek
MN	Goose Lake 070300050205	Goose Lake
MN	Goose Lake 070300050206	Goose Creek

MRBI Planning Watershed in MN

MN	Sauk River 070102020507	Backes Lake-Sauk River
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MN NWQI Watersheds and Source Water Protection Areas for FY20

MN	090201040201	County Ditch 1
MN	090201040202	County Ditch 23
MN	090201040203	County Ditch 6-A
MN	090201040204	Whiskey Creek

MRBI supports each state's nutrient loss reduction strategy with overall goals of improving water quality, restoring wetlands, and enhancing wildlife habitat while ensuring economic viability of agricultural lands along the nation's largest river. The nation's largest hypoxic zone, or low-oxygen area, is located at the mouth of the Mississippi River on the Gulf Coast.

Since its launch, MRBI has:

- Helped producers implement conservation on nearly 1.5 million acres
- Reduced sediment loss by 2 million tons
- Reduced phosphorous loss by 3 million pounds
- Reduced nitrogen loss by 16 million pounds.

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National Water Quality Initiative

NRCS has also designated watersheds within NWQI. NWQI is a partnership among NRCS, state water-quality agencies including Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to identify and address impaired surface water bodies through voluntary conservation. Through NWQI, NRCS provides targeted funding for financial and technical assistance to help farmers apply conservation practices to protect water resources. NWQI includes protection for both surface and ground sources of drinking water.

A total of 175 watersheds – including four in Minnesota – will be receiving financial assistance for practice implementation to address impaired surface waters.

Water quality is improving in NWQI watersheds. State water-quality agency partners report that 27% of NWQI monitoring watersheds show an improvement in water quality in at least one of the NWQI-monitored pollutants (based on 2016 data). Further, 81% of these improvements can be attributed to or associated with agricultural conservation practices implemented by farmers and ranchers.

Since its launch, NWQI has:

- Helped producers implement conservation on over 960,000 acres
- Reduced sediment loss by almost 1 million tons
- Reduced phosphorous loss by 2.5 million pounds
- Reduced nitrogen loss by 11 million pounds

Participating in MRBI and NWQI

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs year-round, but applications are ranked and funded by enrollment periods that are set locally. Producers interested in technical and financial assistance should contact their local NRCS field office.

For more information on watershed initiatives, visit nrcs.usda.gov or contact your local [NRCS field office](#).

