307.27 Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

Initiative Name and Acronym: **Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI)**

Initiative Description/Summary: The purpose of MRBI is to improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat within selected watersheds of the Mississippi River Basin. The initiative provides assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) as described in this guidance.

MRBI is governed by a board of directors, chaired by the Regional Conservationist and composed of the State Conservationists of included States. Adoption and modification of this guidance must be reviewed and approved through the board of directors, assisted by the initiative coordinator.

Approved or Participating States

MRBI funds will be allocated to States for use only within priority watersheds within the following States:

- Arkansas
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Ohio
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Wisconsin

Program Contact Information

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ProTracts Requirements

1. Subaccount Guidance
   For EQIP MRBI funding, States are to select the following MRBI account type in ProTracts: "MRBI." Use of this account type facilitates monitoring of data in ProTracts, which is imperative for MRBI activities. MRBI project-level fund codes are to be created and named beginning with "MRBI" and using the sponsor, project name, or both.

2. Application, Evaluation, and Ranking Tool (AERT) Guidance – Choice Lists and Matrix Data

   - **Approved Land Types to be Populated in ProTracts AERT**
     States must assign the following land uses as eligible for this initiative in AERT (other land uses are not authorized for MRBI):

Required Land Use
Crop
Range
Pasture
Farmstead
Associated Agriculture Lands

- **Approved Natural Resource Concerns to be Populated in ProTracts AERT**
  States must assign the following land uses as eligible for this initiative in AERT (other resource concerns are not authorized for MRBI):

Soil Erosion
Sheet and Rill Erosion
Ephemeral Gully Erosion
Classic Gully Erosion
Wind Erosion
Streambank, Shoreline, Water Conveyance Channels.
Insufficient Water
Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water
Water Quality Degradation
Nutrients in Surface Water
Nutrients in Groundwater
Excessive Sediment in Surface Water
Pesticides in Surface Water
Pesticides in Groundwater
Excess Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, Bio-solids, or Compost Applications in Surface Water
Excess Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, Bio-solids, or Compost Applications in Groundwater
Fish and Wildlife Inadequate Habitat
Inadequate Habitat – Cover/Shelter
Inadequate Habitat – Food
Inadequate Habitat – Habitat Continuity (Space)
Inadequate Habitat – Water

- **Approved Conservation Practices to be Populated in ProTracts AERT**

  Contracts developed under MRBI must include at least one of the applicable core practices, or must be completing a conservation system that supports core practices that are documented as already applied on the land under contract.

Core Practices	
Practice Code	**Practice Name**
Avoiding	
472	Access Control
327	Conservation Cover
328[a]	Conservation Crop Rotation
340	Cover Crop
590[b]	Nutrient Management
528	Prescribed Grazing
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment
Controlling	
330	Contour Farming
342	Critical Area Planting

554	Drainage Water Management
512	Forage and Biomass Planting
412	Grassed Waterway
441**	Irrigation System, Microirrigation
443**	Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface
449	Irrigation Water Management
329	Residue & Tillage Management, No-Till
643	Restoration & Management of Rare and Declining Habitats
442[c]**	Sprinkler System
585	Stripcropping
600	Terrace
645	Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
Trapping	
656	Constructed Wetland
332	Contour Buffer Strips
747	Denitrifying Bioreactor
393	Filter Strip
436**	Irrigation Reservoir
391	Riparian Forest Buffer
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover
601	Vegetative Barrier
635	Vegetated Treatment Area
658	Wetland Creation
659	Wetland Enhancement
657	Wetland Restoration

Supporting Practices That States May Offer to Support This Initiative

Supporting Practices	
Practice Code	**Practice Name**
Avoiding	
316[d]	Animal Mortality Facility
575	Animal Trails and Walkways
317	Composting Facility
382[e]	Fence
511	Forage Harvest Management
561	Heavy Use Area Protection
315[f]	Herbaceous Weed Control
595	Integrated Pest Management
516	Livestock Pipeline
378[g]	Pond
367[m]	Roofs and Covers
558[h]	Roof Runoff Structure
381	Silvopasture Establishment
578	Stream Crossing
360[d]	Waste Facility Closure
632	Waste Separation Facility
313	Waste Storage Facility
634	Waste Transfer
642[g]	Water Well
614	Watering Facility

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Controlling	
324	Deep Tillage
362	Diversion
386	Field Border
410	Grade Stabilization Structure
464**	Irrigation Land Leveling
430[i]	Irrigation Pipeline
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet
484	Mulching
582[j]	Open Channel
533	Pumping Plant
345	Residue & Tillage Management, Reduced Till
587	Structure for Water Control
606	Subsurface Drain
607	Surface Drain, Field Ditch
608[j]	Surface Drain, Main or Lateral
620[k]	Underground Outlet
Trapping	
356	Dike
350	Sediment Basin
646	Shallow Water Development and Management
490[l]	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
629	Waste Treatment
638	Water & Sediment Control Basin

** Practice will only be used in conjunction with 449 and 590

a) A minimum of three different crops must be used or at least 2 years in perennial vegetation.
b) Fall application will give lowest ranking; high-level management such as precision or adaptive nutrient management will be promoted.
c) Only for the purpose of adding appurtenances to an existing sprinkler system that currently meets NRCS standards for the purpose of properly applying chemicals and nutrients.
d) For cases when there is an immediate threat to containment or when there is an immediate safety hazard. This practice should only be used as part of a system change within the recommendations of a CNMP. It may not be a stand-alone practice.
e) Only for use with Access Control (472), Forage Harvest Management (511), Forage and Biomass Planting (512), and Prescribed Grazing (528).
f) For cases when the application is needed based on university-recommended thresholds and the intent of the payment is to reduce the impacts of harmful chemicals to the watershed, or if needed to restore wildlife habitat.
g) For livestock water as part of a grazing management system and only for use if determined to be the most cost-effective (to the Government) water source.
h) Only for use with Waste Storage Facility (313), Composting Facility (317), Heavy Use Protection (561), Solid/Liquid Waste Separation Facility (632), and Waste Transfer (634).
i) In conjunction only with Waste Transfer (634) or Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery (447)+ Nutrient Management (590) + Irrigation Water Management (449).
j) Only for use with the two-stage ditch design.
k) Only to be used as part of a system to treat existing water quality-related resource concerns; the drainage area affecting the 620 must be treated to appropriate quality criteria to limit nutrients and sediments from entering the 620, or a blind inlet or French drain design used.
l) For use with Riparian Forest Buffer (391), Silvopasture Establishment (381), and Tree/Shrub Establishment (612).
m) For use only with Waste Storage Facility (313).

Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs)

Practice Code	Practice Name
102	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
104	Nutrient Management Plan
110	Grazing Management Plan
114	Integrated Pest Management Plan

118	Irrigation Water Management Plan
130	Drainage Water Management Plan

- **Pilot Activities:** States that were approved for pilots may use approved practices not on the above Core and Supporting practice list in those approved pilot locations.

- **AERT Practice-Resource Concern Matrix**

  States will populate the approved conservation practices in the ProTracts AERT and associate all core and supporting practices with resource concerns where CPPE values are positive.

  States should ensure that CPPE values reflect the typical use of supporting practices in conjunction with a core practice and reflect a positive environmental benefit.

3. AERT Guidance – Ranking Criteria Questions

The total ranking points associated with MRBI are to be distributed in AERT and approved ranking questions as follows:

AERT Level	Maximum Points	Point Percentage
National Ranking Questions	250	25%
State Ranking Questions	250	25%
Local Ranking Questions	400	40%
Efficiency Score	100	10%
Total points for this initiative:	1,000	100%

National Ranking Criteria Requirements

National ranking questions are established in ProTracts by National Headquarters.

All national ranking questions apply to MRBI ***except*** the following. These national-level ranking criteria are not applicable and will be answered "No" by the designated conservationist:

4. Air Quality – Will the proposed project improve air quality by (select all that apply):
4a. Meeting on-farm regulatory requirements relating to air quality or proactively avoid the need for regulatory measures?
4b. Implementing practices that reduce on-farm emissions of particulate matter (PM2.5, PM10)?
4c. Implementing practices that reduce on-farm generated greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH4), and nitrous oxide (N2O)?
4d. Implementing practices that increase on-farm carbon sequestration?
8. Energy Conservation – Will the proposed project reduce energy use by (select all that apply):
8a. Reducing on-farm energy consumption?
8b. Implementing practices identified in an approved AgEMP or energy audit that meets ASABE S612 criteria?

State-Level Ranking Criteria Requirements

States will develop State ranking questions that prioritize applications that address priority needs of each State, consistent with the overall MRBI objectives to use a ***systems approach*** in ***focused areas*** to—

- Improve water quality.
- Address water quantity concerns that positively impact *water quality*.
- Improve fish and wildlife habitat.
- Quantify the benefits of conservation implementation and promote adaptive management.
- Promote high-level conservation using innovative technologies.
- Benefit water quality, water quantity, or wildlife habitat through soil health (increased organic matter, water infiltration, water-holding capacity, and nutrient cycling).

Local-Level Ranking Criteria Requirements

Local ranking questions are those developed by the MRBI project sponsor as documented in the approved project proposal (these may be amended as decided by each sponsor to the project) and entered into ProTracts at the State level.

Screening Criteria Requirements

Screening criteria are not required for MRBI. State Conservationists, in consultation with MRBI project sponsors, may develop and approve screening criteria to assist in workload management.

4. Allocation Guidance

Following the receipt of State allocation letters, MRBI States will receive a breakdown of the MRBI allocation by approved project. If it is determined that funds cannot be used as allocated, funds may be moved between approved projects within the State. MRBI funds may not be used as general program funding. In the event a State cannot use its MRBI financial assistance allocation, funds are to be returned to National Headquarters with the appropriate technical assistance funds.