

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 assist States in implementing their nutrient loss reduction strategies. The initiative provides assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) as described in this guidance.

MRBI funding is provided in small priority watersheds as described in multiyear implementation plans. These implementation plans are developed by State conservationists (STCs) in cooperation with their State and local partners. Implementation plans must be informed by watershed assessments (as described in an annual bulletin) that must identify critical source areas related to the primary water quality concerns being addressed by the plan. If a potential priority watershed does not have an assessment that meets this guidance, then STCs may propose to develop a watershed assessment through the readiness phase of MRBI. Each MRBI watershed must have quantifiable interim metrics related to the primary water quality concerns that can be reported annually in addition to a common metric for all MRBI watersheds that captures progress in treating critical source areas. Priority watersheds for MRBI may be added periodically as provided in a national bulletin.

MRBI is governed by a board of directors chaired by the regional conservationist (RC) and composed of the STCs 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

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for MRBI activities. At least one account should be set up for MRBI. States have the option to create watershed-level fund codes. In this case, the subaccounts should be named beginning with “MRBI” and using the watershed name.

2) Application Evaluation Guidance – Choice Lists and Matrix Data:

a. Approved Land Types for MRBI:

STCs must assign the following land uses as eligible for this initiative (other land uses are not authorized for MRBI):

Required Land Use
Crop
Range
Pasture
Farmstead
Associated Agriculture Lands

b. Approved Natural Resource Concerns for MRBI:

STCs must assign the following resource concerns as eligible for this initiative in (other resource concerns are not authorized for MRBI). For planning purpose, States should emphasize the primary resource concerns targeted by MRBI:

Primary Resource Concerns

Soil Erosion
Sheet and Rill Erosion
Ephemeral Gully Erosion
Classic Gully Erosion
Wind Erosion
Streambank, Shoreline, Water Conveyance Channels.
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, Biosolids, or Compost Applications in Surface
Excess Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, Biosolids, or Compost Applications in Groundwater

Note: State ranking criteria should prioritize applications that focus on addressing the primary resource concerns identified above. Below are other resource concerns that may have ancillary benefits associated with addressing water quality.

Secondary Resource Concerns

Fish and Wildlife Inadequate Habitat
Inadequate Habitat – Cover/Shelter
Inadequate Habitat – Food
Inadequate Habitat – Habitat Continuity (Space)
Inadequate Habitat – Water
Insufficient Water

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Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water

c. Core Practices Required to be Offered for MRBI:

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. STCs may offer additional core practices that are included within the MRBI implementation plan or may request a practice waiver from their RC. The core practice must have a water quality purpose.

Core Practices	
Practice Code	Practice Name
Avoiding	
472	Access Control
327	Conservation Cover
328	Conservation Crop Rotation
340	Cover Crop
590	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
449	Irrigation Water Management
329	Residue & Tillage Management, No-Till
585	Stripcropping
600	Terrace
Trapping	
656	Constructed Wetland
332	Contour Buffer Strips
605	Denitrifying Bioreactor
393	Filter Strip
436	Irrigation Reservoir
391	Riparian Forest Buffer
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover
604	Saturated Buffer
601	Vegetative Barrier
635	Vegetated Treatment Area
658	Wetland Creation
659	Wetland Enhancement
657	Wetland Restoration

d. Supporting Practices for MRBI:

Below is a list of supporting practices for MRBI. STCs may use additional supporting practices as documented in the approved MRBI implementation plan as part of a conservation system that addresses water quality. Supporting practices should have a water quality purpose or have a water quality benefit as documented in CPPE. If a supporting practice has potential negative short-term impacts, these must be adequately mitigated through the planning process.

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Supporting Practices	
Practice Code	Practice Name
Avoiding	
316	Animal Mortality Facility
575	Animal Trails and Walkways
317	Composting Facility
382	Fence
511	Forage Harvest Management
561	Heavy Use Area Protection
315	Herbaceous Weed Control
595	Integrated Pest Management
516	Livestock Pipeline
378	Pond
367	Roofs and Covers
558	Roof Runoff Structure
381	Silvopasture Establishment
578	Stream Crossing
360	Waste Facility Closure
632	Waste Separation Facility
313	Waste Storage Facility
634	Waste Transfer
642	Water Well
614	Watering Facility
Controlling	
333	Amending Soil Properties with Gypsum Products
591	Amendments for Treatment of Agricultural Waste
324	Deep Tillage
362	Diversion
386	Field Border
410	Grade Stabilization Structure
464	Irrigation Land Leveling
430	Irrigation Pipeline
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation
443	Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet
484	Mulching
582	Open Channel
533	Pumping Plant
345	Residue & Tillage Management, Reduced Till
643	Restoration & Management of Rare and Declining Habitats
318	Short Term Storage of Animal Waste and Byproducts
442	Sprinkler System
587	Structure for Water Control
606	Subsurface Drain
607	Surface Drain, Field Ditch
608	Surface Drain, Main or Lateral
620	Underground Outlet
645	Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
Trapping	
356	Dike
350	Sediment Basin
646	Shallow Water Development and Management
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
629	Waste Treatment
638	Water & Sediment Control Basin

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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

3. Application Evaluation and Ranking for MRBI

At the time this national instruction is being published, a new methodology for prioritizing applications is being developed. This section provides the general criteria that will be used to prioritize those applicants that best address the resource concerns targeted through MRBI. Inputs to the designated screening and ranking tool should be based on the watershed assessment.

Prioritization criteria include—

- Addressing primary water quality concerns by supporting the States' nutrient loss reduction strategies.
- Focusing implementation within critical source areas identified in watershed assessments.
- Addressing water quantity concerns that positively impact water quality.
- Improving fish and wildlife habitat while addressing water quality.
- Quantifying the benefits of conservation implementation and promote adaptive management.
- Promoting high-level conservation using innovative technologies.

Allocation Guidance:

Following the receipt of State allocation letters, MRBI STCs 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.