

**Initiative Name and Acronym:** National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI).

**Initiative Description:** The purpose of NWQI is to work with producers and landowners to implement voluntary conservation practices as part of areawide efforts to improve water quality in high-priority areas. These areas are defined primarily by subwatersheds and referred to in this guidance generally as NWQI watersheds. NWQI is designed to help individual agricultural producers take actions to reduce the runoff of sediment, nutrients, and pathogens into surface waters where water quality is a critical concern. Practice implementation is focused to identified areas of the watershed most in need of treatment. NWQI also assists with practice implementation on priority source water protection areas, where the drinking water source is surface or ground water.

The process for adding or withdrawing NWQI watersheds is provided in an annual bulletin for NWQI watershed selection. New watersheds submitted for consideration must have a watershed assessment (as described in the annual bulletin) that identifies critical source areas for the primary resource concerns. If a priority watershed does not have an assessment that meets this guidance, then a watershed can be proposed for the readiness phase of NWQI. State conservationists (STCs) propose new watersheds for consideration by submitting a multiyear implementation plan. Each NWQI watershed must have quantifiable interim metrics related to the primary water quality concern that can be reported annually, in addition to a common metric for all NWQI watersheds that captures progress in treating critical source areas as identified in watershed assessments.

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**ProTracts Requirements:**

This guidance establishes action items to be completed by STCs to support NWQI.

States are to establish subaccounts and populate the ranking evaluation criteria in ProTracts AERT and other actions as follows.

1. **Account Guidance:**  
STCs must establish an account in ProTracts for NWQI and assign the account type of “National Water Quality.” States can choose to establish a separate subaccount for each approved watershed. In this case subaccounts must be assigned the name “NWQI – (name of 12-digit HUC).”
2. **Application Evaluation Guidance – Choice Lists and Matrix Data:**
  - a. **Approved Land Types for NWQI:**  
STCs must assign the following land uses as eligible for the initiative:

Required Land Use
Crop
Forest

Range
Pasture
Farmstead

b. Approved Natural Resource Concerns for NWQI:

STCs must assign the nationally approved natural resource concerns for each NWQI subaccount established. For planning purposes, States should emphasize the primary resource concerns targeted by NWQI.

**Primary Natural Resource Concerns**

Water Quality Degradation
Nutrients in Surface Water
Excessive Sediment in Surface Water
Excess Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, Biosolids or Compost Applications in Surface Water

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

**Secondary Natural Resource Concerns**

Water Quality Degradation
Nutrients in Groundwater
Salts in Groundwater
Salts in Surface Water
Excess Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, Biosolids, or Compost Applications in Groundwater
Pesticides in Groundwater
Pesticides in Surface Water
Elevated Water Temperature
Fish and Wildlife – Inadequate Habitat
Inadequate Habitat – Water

Note: No additional resource concerns may be added by States.

c. Core Practices Required to be Offered for NWQI:

NWQI emphasizes a “systems approach” to address priority natural resource concerns. A cornerstone of this approach is to encourage producers to implement a system of practices that has been determined to address specific high-priority resource concerns in selected watersheds and incorporate practices that address the concepts of avoiding, controlling, or trapping pollutants, or “ACT.”

Contracts developed under NWQI 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 must offer core practices from the list below, consistent with the treatment needs in each NWQI watershed. STCs may offer additional core practices that are included with the NWQI implementation plan or may request a practice waiver from the regional conservationist for those NWQI watersheds that do not yet have an implementation plan. The core practice must have a water quality purpose.

Core Practices	Code	Avoiding	Controlling	Trapping
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Waste Storage Facility	313	X	X	
Animal Mortality Facility	316		X	
Composting Facility	317	X	X	
Conservation Cover	327	X		X
Conservation Crop Rotation	328	X		
Residue and Tillage Management, No Till/Strip Till/Direct Seed	329		X	X
Contour Farming	330		X	X
Contour Orchard and Other Perennial Crops	331		X	X
Contour Buffer Strips	332			X
Cover Crop	340	X		X
Critical Area Planting	342		X	X
Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till	345		X	X
Well Water Testing	355	X		
Waste Treatment Lagoon	359		X	
Waste Facility Closure	360	X		
Anaerobic Digester	366		X	
Field Border	386		X	X
Riparian Herbaceous Cover	390			X
Riparian Forest Buffer	391			X
Filter Strip	393		X	X
Stream Habitat Improvement and Management	395	X		
Grade Stabilization Structure	410		X	X
Grassed Waterway	412		X	
Irrigation Reservoir	436		X	
Irrigation Water Management	449		X	
Access Control	472	X		
Prescribed Grazing	528	X		
Drainage Water Management	554		X	
Heavy Use Area Protection	561	X		
Trails and Walkways	575		X	
Streambank and Shoreline Protection	580	X		
Nutrient Management	590	X		
Terrace	600		X	
Vegetative Barrier	601			X
Saturated Buffer	604			X
Denitrifying Bioreactor	605			X
Tree/Shrub Establishment	612	X		X
Waste Treatment	629		X	
Waste Recycling	633		X	
Waste Transfer	634	X		
Vegetated Treatment Area	635			X
Water and Sediment Control Basin	638		X	X
Constructed Wetland	656			X

d. Supporting Conservation Practices:

Below is a list of supporting practices for NWQI. STCs may offer additional supporting practices in consultation with the NWQI Coordinator or documented in the approved NWQI 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 and documented in the system narrative in the implementation plan.

<b>Supporting Practices</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Avoiding</b>	<b>Controlling</b>	<b>Trapping</b>
Agrichemical Handling Facility	309	X		
Alley Cropping	311		X	X
Brush Management	314	X	X	
Herbaceous Weed Control	315	X		
Short Term Storage of Animal Waste and Byproducts	318		X	
Amending Soil Properties with Gypsum Products	333		X	
Prescribed Burning	338	X		
Sediment Basin	350		X	
Water Well Decommissioning	351	X		
Dike	356		X	X
Diversion	362		X	
Roofs and Covers	367	X	X	
Pond	378			X
Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	380		X	X
Silvopasture Establishment	381	X		
Fence	382	X		
Dam	402		X	X
Hedgerow Planting	422	X		X
Hillside Ditch	423		X	
Irrigation Ditch Lining	428	X	X	
Irrigation Pipeline	430		X	
Irrigation System, Micro irrigation	441	X		
Sprinkler System	442	X		
Irrigation System, Surface & Subsurface	443	X		
Precision Land Forming	462			X
Irrigation Land Leveling	464	X	X	
Lined Waterway or Outlet	468		X	
Mulching	484		X	X
Forage Harvest Management	511	X	X	
Forage and Biomass Planting	512	X		X
Livestock Pipeline	516	X	X	
Range Planting	550			X
Row Arrangement	557	X		

<b>Supporting Practices</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Avoiding</b>	<b>Controlling</b>	<b>Trapping</b>
Roof Runoff Structure	558	X		
Access Road	560	X		
Spring Development	574	X		
Stream Crossing	578	X		
Open Channel	582		X	
Stripcropping	585		X	
Structure for Water Control	587		X	X
Cross Wind Ridges	588		X	
Cross Wind Trap Strips	589C		X	X
Amendments for the Treatment of Agricultural Waste	591	X	X	
Integrated Pest Management	595	X		
Herbaceous Wind Barriers	603		X	
Surface Drain, Field Ditch	607		X	
Surface Drain, Main or Lateral	608		X	
Surface Roughening	609	X		
Watering Facility	614	X		
Underground Outlet	620		X	
Solid/Liquid Waste Separation Facility	632		X	
Waterspreading	640		X	
Water Well	642	X		
Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats	643	X		
Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management	644		X	
Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation	650		X	X
Wetland Restoration	657		X	
Wetland Creation	658		X	
Wetland Enhancement	659		X	

### Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs)

<b>Conservation Activity Plans</b>	<b>Code</b>
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan	102
Nutrient Management Plan	104
Irrigation Water Management Plan	118
Drainage Water Management Plan	130

### 3. Application Evaluation and Ranking for NWQI

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 NWQI. Inputs to the designated screening and ranking tool should be based on the watershed assessment.

Prioritization criteria developed for each NWQI watershed include considerations relevant to the overall NWQI objectives to use a *systems approach* in *focused areas* to—

- Improve water quality in water bodies that are impaired or that contribute to the impairment of another water body, or that have approved TMDLs, for sediment, nutrients, and/or pathogens.
- Address water quality concerns identified in source water protection areas.
- Implement conservation systems on critical source areas that utilize avoiding, controlling and trapping strategies.
- Quantify the benefits of conservation implementation and promote adaptive management.
- Promote high-level conservation using innovative technologies.

### **Allocation Guidance**

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