

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 reduction strategies associated with the Hypoxia Task Force Action Plan. NRCS designates MRBI focus area watersheds (HUC 8) that align with each State's priorities for nutrient reduction. These focus watersheds typically represent those that contribute the greatest nutrient loads, due to agricultural sources, to the Gulf of Mexico. MRBI efforts are targeted to small priority watersheds within these larger focus watersheds. The initiative provides assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) as described in this guidance. There is also a Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) component of MRBI.

MRBI funding is made available in small priority watersheds (HUC 12) and is delivered as described in multiyear implementation plans for individual or project groups of priority watersheds. These implementation plans are developed by State Conservationists (STCs) in cooperation with their State and local partners. Implementation plans document annual targets for conservation treatments and must be informed by watershed assessments that identify critical source areas related to nutrient and sediment loss. Implementation plans must also contain quantifiable interim metrics for each watershed related to the primary water quality concerns that can be reported annually. These metrics are in addition to a common metric for all MRBI watersheds that captures progress in treating critical source areas.

MRBI is governed by a board of directors chaired by a 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/Participating States:

Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, Wisconsin.

The process for adding or withdrawing MRBI watersheds is provided in an annual bulletin for MRBI selection. If a priority watershed does not have an assessment that meets NRCS guidance, then a watershed can be proposed for the planning phase of MRBI.

Program Contact Information

For questions specific to MRBI, please contact the Water Quality Coordinator or Areawide Planning Branch Chief.

For general programmatic questions, please contact the Financial Assistance Programs Division Branch Chief.

Business Tool Requirements:

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

1. **Protracts Guidance:**
STCs must establish a separate ranking pool for MRBI. The ranking pool must be associated with the "MRBI" Account Type in Protracts.
2. **CART Ranking Guidance:**
States will use the MRBI national ranking template and guidance to develop the ranking pool(s) for MRBI. The national templates provide the approved land uses and primary resource concerns. The default weightings for each Resource Concern Category and subcategory on the template reflect the relative priority of the concerns. States may adjust the resource concern weightings within the ranges identified on the MRBI national ranking template, as needed, to prioritize the state-specific primary natural resource concerns

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The MRBI national template and ranking guidance are available in NI-440-310 *NRCS Program Ranking through Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART)*, Exhibits W and X:

<https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/viewDirective.aspx?hid=44483>

3. Funding and Allocation Guidance

STCs will use the multi-year implementation budgets as a basis for State Resource Assessment funding requests. Following the receipt of State allocation letters, STCs will receive a breakdown of MRBI watershed funding needs for the FY as outlined in the submitted implementation plans to guide allocation among watersheds. If STCs determine that funds cannot be used as allocated, funds may be moved between approved watersheds within the State. Funds for MRBI may not be used as general program funding. In the event a STC cannot use their MRBI-dedicated funding, funds are to be returned to National Headquarters with the appropriate technical assistance funds.

a. 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 and justified within the MRBI implementation plan. 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
313	Waste Storage Facility
Controlling	
330	Contour Farming
342	Critical Area Planting
554	Drainage Water Management
512	Forage and Biomass Planting
410	Grade Stabilization Structure
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

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638	Water & Sediment Control Basin
658	Wetland Creation
659	Wetland Enhancement
657	Wetland Restoration

b. 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.

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
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
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

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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

Conservation Planning Activities (CPAs)

Practice Code	Practice Name
102	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
116	Soil Health Management Plan
138	Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition
199	Conservation Planning Assessment

Design and Implementation Activities (DIAs)

Practice Code	Practice Name
101	CNMP Design and Implementation Activity
120	Agricultural Energy Design
140	Transition to Organic Design and Implementation Activity
144	Fish and Wildlife Habitat Design and Implementation Activity
148	Pollinator Habitat Design and Implementation Activity
157	Nutrient Management Design and Implementation Activity
158	Feed Management Design and Implementation Activity
159	Grazing Management Design and Implementation Activity
160	Prescribed Burning Design and Implementation Activity
161	Pest Management Conservation System Design and Implementation Activity
162	Soil Health Management Design and Implementation Activity
163	Irrigation Water Management Design and Implementation Activity
164	Drainage Water Management Design and Implementation Activity

Conservation and Evaluation Monitoring Activities (CEMAs)

Practice Code	Practice Name
207	Site Assessment and Soil Testing for Contaminants Activity
216	Soil Health Testing
217	Soil and Source Testing for Nutrient Management
218	Carbon Sequestration and Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Assessment
228	Agricultural Energy Assessment

Use of Priority Tool:

Not applicable for MRBI.

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Maps:

Current map of MRBI focus area and priority watersheds are located at:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/initiatives/?cid=stelprdb1048200>