

307.28 National Water Quality Initiative

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 sub watersheds (HUC 12) 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 (SWPAs), where the drinking water source is surface or ground water. In this case, NWQI addresses identified threats to drinking water, either to remediate impairments or protect clean sources.

NWQI is governed by a board of directors chaired by a Regional Conservationist (RC) and composed of select States from each Region. All NWQI guidance and instructions are reviewed by the board, assisted by the initiative coordinator.

Program Contact Information:

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

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

Approved/Participating States:

All states and areas are eligible for participation.

The process for adding or withdrawing NWQI watersheds or source water protection areas is provided in an annual bulletin for NWQI selection. New watersheds or SWPAs submitted for consideration must have an assessment (as described in the annual bulletin) that identifies critical source areas for the primary resource concerns. If a priority watershed or SWPA does not have an assessment that meets this guidance, then a watershed can be proposed for the planning phase of NWQI.

State Conservationists (STCs) propose new watersheds or SWPAs for consideration by submitting a multi-year implementation plan. These implementation plans are developed by STCs in cooperation with their State and local partners. Implementation plans document annual targets for conservation treatments and must be informed by watershed assessments. Implementation plans must also contain quantifiable interim metrics for each watershed related to the primary water quality concerns and that can be reported annually. These metrics are in addition to a common metric for all NWQI watersheds that captures progress in treating critical source areas as identified in watershed or SWPA assessments.

Business Tool Requirements:

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

1. Protracts Guidance:

STCs must establish a separate ranking pool for NWQI. The ranking pool must be associated with the “National Water Quality” Account Type in Protracts.

2. CART Ranking Guidance:

States will use the NWQI national ranking template and guidance to develop the ranking pool(s) for NWQI. 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

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the resource concern weightings within the ranges identified on the NWQI national ranking template, as needed, to prioritize the state-specific primary natural resource concerns

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

<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 NWQI 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 NWQI may not be used as general program funding. In the event a STC cannot use their NWQI-dedicated funding, funds are to be returned to National Headquarters with the appropriate technical assistance funds.

Core and Supporting Practices:

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 and justified within the watershed(s) or source water protection assessments. The core practice must have a water quality purpose.

Core Practices	Code	Avoiding	Controlling	Trapping
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		

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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

Supporting Conservation Practices:

Below is a list of supporting practices for NWQI. STCs may offer additional supporting practices as part of a conservation system that addresses water quality. Additional supporting practices must be documented in the approved NWQI implementation plan and justified in the watershed or source water protection assessment(s). Supporting practices should have a water quality purpose, or 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.

Supporting Practices	Code	Avoiding	Controlling	Trapping
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	

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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		
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	

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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 Planning Activities (CPAs)

Practice Name	Practice Code
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP)	102
Forest Management Plan	106
Soil Health Management Plan	116
Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition	138
Conservation Planning Assessment	199

Design and Implementation Activities (DIAs)

Practice Name	Practice Code
CNMP Design and Implementation Activity (CNMP)	101
Agricultural Energy Design	120
Transition to Organic Design and Implementation Activity	140
Fish and Wildlife Habitat Design and Implementation Activity	144
Pollinator Habitat Design and Implementation Activity	148
Nutrient Management Design and Implementation Activity	157
Feed Management Design and Implementation Activity	158
Grazing Management Design and Implementation Activity	159
Prescribed Burning Design and Implementation Activity	160

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Pest Management Conservation System Design and Implementation Activity	161
Soil Health Management Design and Implementation Activity	162
Irrigation Water Management Design and Implementation Activity	163
Drainage Water Management Design and Implementation Activity	164
Forest Management Design and Implementation Activity	165

Conservation and Evaluation Monitoring Activities (CEMAs)

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

Use of Priority Tool:

Not applicable for NWQI

Maps:

Current map of NWQI watersheds is located at:

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/PA_NRCSCconsumption/download?cid=nrcseprd1554419&ext=pdf