

307.35 WaterSMART Initiative (WSI)

Initiative Name and Acronym: WaterSMART Initiative (WSI)

Initiative Description: The purpose of WSI is to assist producers and landowners in implementing voluntary conservation that is complementary to the water conservation assistance provided through the Department of Interior’s Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) Sustain and Manage America’s Resources for Tomorrow (WaterSMART) program. Where Reclamation supports water conservation planning and improvement projects by States, tribes, local governments, irrigation water companies, and other organizations, NRCS targets assistance to agricultural producers to improve water conservation and irrigation water use efficiency on their operation.

Priorities for the joint effort are—

- Improving irrigation water use efficiency
- Preventing groundwater depletion
- Preventing surface water depletion
- Optimal use of naturally available moisture and prevention of drought stress

Program Contact Information:

Financial Assistance Programs Division

- Programs Branch Chief

Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance Division

- Areawide Planning Branch Chief
- Conservation Initiatives Coordinator for WSI

Approved States and Priority Areas: States and NRCS administrative areas where Reclamation offers its WaterSMART Programs may participate in WSI. These are: Alaska, Arizona, California, Caribbean Area, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pacific Islands Area, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

The process for submitting priority areas proposed by State Conservationists (STCs) for WSI is provided in an annual national bulletin. Priority areas are selected from the best proposals ranked according to national evaluation criteria approved by a board of directors. The board of directors is made up of several STCs appointed by the Regional Conservationists for the West and Central Regions.

Business Tool Requirements: This guidance establishes action items to be completed by STCs to support WSI:

1. **Protracts Guidance:**

STCs will select the “WaterSmart” account type in Protracts Fund Manager.

2. **CART Ranking Pool Guidance:**

States will use the WaterSMART national ranking template and guidance to develop the ranking pool(s) for the WSI. 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 WaterSMART national ranking template, as needed,

to prioritize the state-specific primary natural resource concerns.

The national ranking guidance identifies any required survey questions that must be included in each of the display-group sections: applicability, category, program, and resource.

The WaterSMART national template and ranking guidance are available in NI-440-310 NRCS Program Ranking through Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART), Exhibits AA and AB: <https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/viewDirective.aspx?hid=44483>

3. Funding and Allocation Guidance:

STCs will estimate multi-year funding needs within approved priority area as a basis for State Resource Assessment funding requests. Following the receipt of State allocation letters, STCs will receive a breakdown of WSI funding by priority area if multiple priority areas have been approved in their State. If STCs determine that funds cannot be used as allocated, funds may be moved between approved priority areas within the State. WSI funds may not be moved into other EQIP account types. In the event a STC cannot use their WSI-dedicated funding, funds are to be returned to National Headquarters with the appropriate technical assistance funds.