

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)

A partnership among NRCS, state water quality agencies, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to improve and protect water quality through voluntary conservation.

Watershed NWQI – Established in FY2012 to address agricultural sources of water pollution, specifically nutrients, sediment and pathogens in priority watersheds.

- Impaired: A stream or water body documented to be impaired and identified on a State's 303(d) list
- TMDL: A stream or waterbody that is considered impaired but removed from the 303(d) list because there is a TMDL plan for implementation
- Threatened: A stream or waterbody with water quality data documenting an impairment
- Critical: A stream or waterbody upstream of an impaired segment that is determined by the STC to be a significant contributing source of the downstream impairment

Source Water Protection NWQI – Added in FY2019 to include source water protection for ground and surface waters that may not face water pollution challenges that would otherwise make them eligible for watershed NWQI.

- Addresses agricultural related impacts to water used as a public drinking water supply – surface or ground water systems
- Areas based on delineations provided by the State drinking water program or the water utility.



NWQI - Planning Phase



Planning Phase – planning phase allows for watersheds and SWPAs to be included in NWQI and prepare for the implementation phase.

- Sufficient assessment to guide the siting and implementation of conservation practices at the HUC-12 level or within SWPAs for greatest water quality benefit
- Identification of critical source areas for identified pollutants of concerns
- Establishment goals for water quality improvement, with specific metrics that can establish progress towards these goals
- Outreach strategies for implementation on vulnerable acres



NWQI - Implementation Phase



Implementation Phase – implementation watersheds and SWPAs are those ready to receive financial assistance for implementation. The implementation phase requires completed NRCS watershed/areawide assessments and maps identifying critical source areas and outreach strategies for all watersheds or SWPA proposed for inclusion.

- Implementation dollars come and NWQI specific EQIP and are managed by NRCS through the usual EQIP sign-up and contract obligation process (Implementation NWQI is like a WQ specific CIS – and would be managed like a CIS)

Considerations:

- Is there adequate technical capacity, from NRCS, to conduct sufficient outreach and technical assistance to meet project goals?
- Is there sufficient density of producers and producer interest to meet project goals? For example, is there a backlog of EQIP applications in the area and producer engagement in addressing water quality concerns? Are most, or the majority of, targeted producers EQIP-eligible?
- Is there an opportunity for partners to provide in-stream water quality monitoring or other monitoring or measurement that can help track the change in water quality attributed to NWQI practices?

