

Water Resources Coordinating Council
AGENDA AND MINUTES
November 6, 2009
2:00 – 4:00 PM
Iowa State Capitol – Legislative Dining Room

AGENDA

- I. Call to Order, Governor's Office
- II. Approve September Minutes
- III. Approve November Agenda
- IV. Topics of Discussion
 - a. HF 756 – Flood Plain Subcommittee Review/Discussion, Co-Chairs Bill Ehm and Chuck Gipp
 - b. Mississippi River Basin Health Watersheds Initiative, Rich Sims, NRCS
- V. Future plans and meetings, Governor

MINUTES

- I. Call to Order, Jamie Cashman, IGOV
- II. September Minutes, Jamie Cashman, IGOV. All in favor to approve.
- III. November Agenda, Jamie Cashman, IGOV. All in favor to approve.
- IV. Topics of Discussion
 - a. Rich Sims, NRCS, discusses the Mississippi River Basin Health Watersheds Initiative. NRCS is going to be accepting Request for Proposals soon.
 - b. HF 756 – Flood Plain Subcommittee Review/Discussion, Co-Chairs Bill Ehm, IDNR, and Chuck Gipp, IDALS-DSC
 - i. Bill Ehm introduces the report to the Council, including providing a brief summary of the work over the summer to put the report together. Over 200 people were involved in the process. Stresses the importance of not repeating the same mistakes.
 - ii. Chuck Gipp noted of the 87 pages presented to the Council, the recommendations are only on seven pages. Hard copies of the public comments are available upon request and online. The report is grouped differently than in previous drafts. Before the report was grouped by topic—Flood Plains, Uplands, Lowlands, and Stormwater. Now, the report is grouped by Regulatory, Planning/Design, and Education. Funding is considered a different section.
 - iii. Bill Ehm and Chuck Gipp read each recommendation to the Council.
 - iv. David Osterberg, UI, commented on recommendation D...can “whenever practicable” be redrafted to “unless unavoidable”? The language “whenever practicable” does not seem appropriate. Susan Dixon read the rationale regarding Recommendation D. Motion by Bill Ehm to accept David Osterberg’s change; General Dardis, RIO seconds. All in favor.
 - v. Public Comment received on recommendation E. Stream channelization should be deleted from the recommendation because it does not seem to fit within the context of the recommendation. Jessica Montana, IDED, commented that stream channelization is vital within the sentence; merely serves as examples. Deleting “stream channelization” is fine. No motion was presented to delete stream channelization.
 - vi. Public comment received regarding deleting Recommendation 8. Why was 8 deleted if Recommendation G is present? Language tends to limit the ability for districts to levee funds. Can “on built-up areas” be deleted? Marty Adkins, NRCS, provided clarification. The work group discussion looked to focus on investments on levees and the most built-up areas of development. Further, the intent was to focus on more urban areas. Bill Ehm added Recommendation G includes other areas; it does not focus just on “built-up areas”. No motion was presented to change the language.
 - vii. Moving on, Jamie Cashman opened discussion regarding the Research/Education. No comments were received by the Council. One

public comment was received by Ken Tow, RIO, who stated that HF2400, as mentioned in Recommendation P, has been codified in Iowa Code 466B.3.

- viii. Moving on, Jamie Cashman opened discussion regarding the Funding options presented in the report.
- ix. David Osterberg commented on Recommendation GG, stating the first sentence is awkwardly written and unclear. Tom Oswald, HSEMD, stated the intent of Recommendation GG is to provide additional funding for research and project implementation and to recognize that interests groups have already conducted research. However, the language could be adjusted for clarity. Susan Judkins, RIO, proposed a restatement based on the discussion of the group: "Recommend increased funding for research and project implementation in the public and/or private sector." Bill Ehm motioned to adjust the language as provided by Susan Judkins. Chuck Gipp seconded. All in favor.
- x. David Osterberg commented on Recommendation II asking whether the language should distinguish between the Drinking Water SRF versus the Clean Water SRF. Bill Ehm affirmed and motioned to accept Osterberg's recommendation to distinguish the SRF programs from "State Revolving Fund" to "Clean Water State Revolving Fund". Chuck Gipp seconded. All in favor.
- xi. At the end of evaluating all recommendations, Chuck Gipp motions to accept the report. Larry Weber, UI Iowa Flood Center seconds. All in favor.
- xii. Jamie Cashman thanks the chairs and all persons involved in this effort. IGOV is in the middle of drafting its policy package together, so the HF756 report will be considered. If the Council or the public would like to make additional questions or comments, please contact him.

VI. Future plans and meetings, Governor's Office

- a. Bill Ehm stated the Watershed Subcommittee intends to have its next meeting December 9, 2009 to continue its work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop a watershed plan for the Iowa River-Cedar River Basin.
- b. Chuck Gipp stated the Division of Soil Conservation is working with the City of Palo and other stakeholders regarding Dry Creek, which drains into the Cedar River.
- c. Chuck Gipp stated the Iowa Wetlands and Drainage Institution could also be an agenda item for the next WRCC meeting
- d. Chuck Gipp stated a progress report / status update regarding nutrient load reduction would be available late January 2010.



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Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

Overview

To improve the health of the Mississippi River Basin, including water quality and wildlife habitat, the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service is developing a new Initiative. Through the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI), NRCS and its partners will work with producers in selected watersheds to help them voluntarily implement conservation practices which avoid, control and trap nutrient runoff, improve wildlife habitat, and maintain agricultural productivity.

These improvements will be accomplished through a conservation systems approach to manage and optimize nitrogen (N) and phosphorous (P) within fields to minimize runoff and reduce downstream nutrient loading. NRCS will provide producers assistance with a system of practices that will control soil erosion, improve soil quality, and provide wildlife habitat while managing runoff and drainage water for improved water quality.

Through the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI), the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP), Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG), and other programs, the Initiative will build on the past efforts of producers, NRCS, partners and other state and federal agencies in the 12-state Initiative area to address nutrient loading in the Mississippi River Basin. Nutrient loading contributes to both local water quality problems and the Hypoxic Zone in the Gulf of Mexico. The 12 participating states are Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

NRCS will offer this Initiative through the life of the 2008 Farm Bill and will dedicate at least \$80 million in each of fiscal years (FY) 2010-2013, in addition to other Federal, State and partner funding and the contributions of producers.

The \$80 million will be in addition to regular program funding in the 12 Initiative states.

NRCS MRBI Funding (in millions of dollars)

	2010	2011	2012	2013
CCPI	\$50	\$50	\$50	\$50
WREP	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$25
CIG	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5
Total	\$80	\$80	\$80	\$80

How Will MRBI Work?

Step One: Watershed Selection

The first step will be to select the participating watersheds in the fall of 2009. State Technical Committee members will provide input on the conservation objectives to be achieved in the focus areas. Each state will select up to three 8-digit Hydrologic Unit Area watersheds, known as focus areas, for the MRBI. When making these selections, states will consider future growth opportunities and providing opportunities for maximum program participation. States will use a consistent watershed evaluation process including the following information:

- Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) data.
- Spatially Referenced Regression On Watershed (SPARROW) Attributes, which is a statistically based USGS modeling approach that attempts to explain in-stream measures of water quality in relation to upstream sources.
- State-level nutrient reduction strategy and priorities.
- State-level water quality data.
- Monitoring and modeling of N and P management in the watershed.

NRCS will work to ensure applied conservation will have a measurable effect on water quality nutrient issues at the edge of farm fields.



12 Participating States

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

Step Two: Selecting Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) Proposals

Using CCPI as the foundation for this Initiative facilitates leveraging the investment from non-Federal sources and ensures coordination of NRCS efforts with other Federal, State, tribal, and local efforts. CCPI offers a statutory (2008 Farm Bill) funding mechanism for targeting resources on a watershed basis across three programs; the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

areas. The proposals will receive a higher ranking score if they are offered on the 12-digit HUC (10,000 to 40,000 acre) scale. This will allow for multiple proposals to compete within the larger focus area, creating more opportunity for applicants. Proposals on this smaller scale will also allow for the applied practices to provide for a concentrated effect and offer a better opportunity to measure Initiative outcomes.

Proposals with watersheds limited to one state will be submitted to the appropriate State Conservationist. Proposals with watersheds that cross state lines will be submitted to the NRCS Chief.

The advantages of using CCPI as the principal delivery vehicle include:

- Targets three programs in a competitive approach to critical watersheds.
- Leverages partner contributions and solicits for them competitively through the Request for Proposals (RFP).
- Allows the introduction of flexibilities not inherent in each program's normal delivery and operations.

Conservation Practices

The Initiative will emphasize a "systems approach" to address water quality resource concerns. A cornerstone of this approach is to use screening and ranking systems to focus program support to producers who agree to implement a system of practices that has been determined to address specific high priority resource concerns in selected watersheds.

Implementation

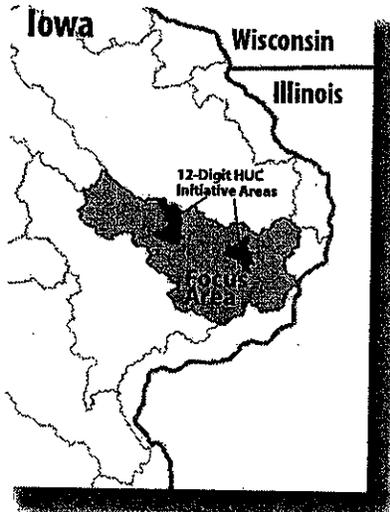
Early in FY 2010, NRCS will issue a CCPI Request for Proposals (RFPs) specific to the MRBI and the 12 participating states. The CCPI RFP will provide for up to \$50 million dollars of financial assistance in FY 2010 toward the implementation of conservation practices in at least one watershed per State.

The \$50 million in CCPI dedicated to the MRBI will not be counted toward the 6% of set aside funds or acres required of States for CCPI; it will be over and above the 6% and used for the sole purpose of the MRBI. The RFP will allow for 20% of the \$50 million to be managed at the national level for projects that are multi-state. The remaining 80% of the \$50 million will be managed at the state level to maximize flexibility in implementing conservation systems specific to different regions.

This \$50 million increase may only be used to address MRBI-related CCPI agreements.

The RFP will allow for partners to submit proposals within each State's focus

Example Focus Area with Selected CCPI Proposals



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CORE CONSERVATION PRACTICES	
Practice Code*	Practice Name
VOIDING	
328 ^a	Conservation Crop Rotation
340	Cover Crop
590 ^b	Nutrient Management
CONTROLLING	
329	Residue & Tillage Management
330	Contouring
345	Residue & Tillage Management
346	Residue & Tillage Management
412	Grassed Waterway
554	Drainage Water Management
585	Stripcropping
600	Terrace
635	Wastewater Treatment Strip
TRAPPING	
332	Contour Buffer Strips
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover
391	Riparian Forest Buffer
393	Filter Strip
601	Vegetative Barriers
656	Constructed Wetland
657	Wetland Restoration
658	Wetland Creation
659	Wetland Enhancement
747	Denitrifying Bioreactor

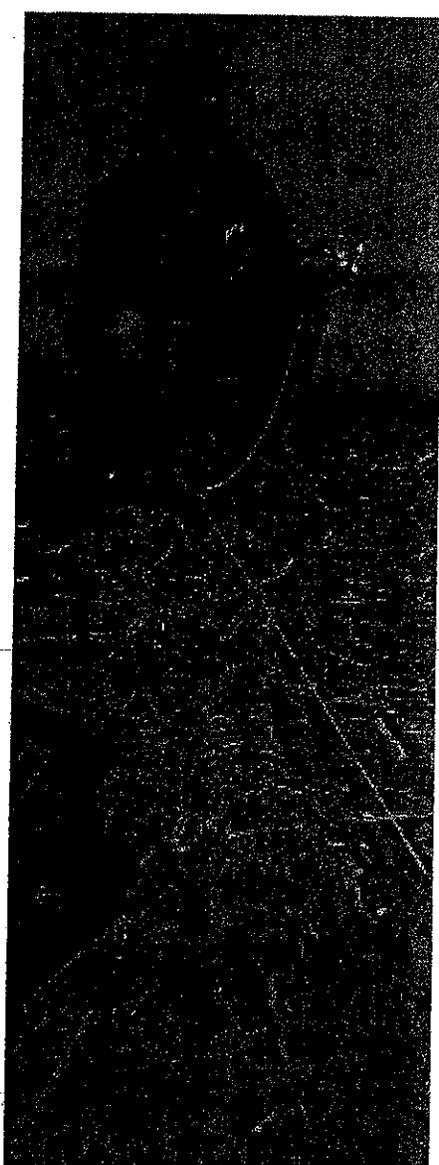
SUPPORTING CONSERVATION PRACTICES	
VOIDING	
313	Waste Storage Facility
317	Composting Facility
327	Conservation Cover
381	Silvopasture Establishment
382 ^c	Fence
472	Access Control
511	Forage Harvest Management
512	Pasture & Hayland Planting
528	Prescribed Grazing
558 ^d	Roof Runoff Structure
561	Heavy Use Area Protection
612	Tree & Shrub Planting
632	Solid/Liquid Waste Separation Facility
633	Waste Utilization
634	Waste Transfer
646	Shallow Water Management
CONTROLLING	
324	Deep Tillage
342 ^e	Critical Area Planting
362	Diversion
386	Field Border
410	Grade Stabilization Structure
447	Tailwater Recovery
449	Irrigation Water Management
484	Mulching
533	Pumping Plant
587	Structure for Water Control
606	Subsurface Drainage
607	Surface Drainage
620 ^f	Underground Outlet
638	Water & Sediment Control Basin
430 ^g	Irrigation Water Conveyance, Pipeline

TRAPPING	
342	Critical Area Planting
350	Sediment Basin
356	Dike
410	Grade Stabilization Structure
533	Pumping Plant
587	Structure for Water Control
638	Water & Sediment Control Basin

- a. Must add at least 3rd crop to the rotation.
- b. Fall application will give lowest ranking.
- c. Only for use with 512, 528, and 511.
- d. Only for use with 313, 317, 561, 632, 634 and 633.
- e. As a component of wetlands, construction, or earth-disturbing practice.
- f. As a supplement to terraces and sediment basins.
- g. In conjunction with 634 (waste transfer).

* Practice codes relate to the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (National Conservation Practice Handbook).

NOTE:
Water management practices, such as underground outlets, will be used in combination with proper water filtering to ensure nutrient trapping.



Instead of addressing one aspect of a resource concern by implementing one practice, participants will implement a system of practices; that is, multiple practices and management techniques that work together to address the P and N generated from agricultural runoff. The nationally-approved practices selected for this Initiative will address priority resource concerns using general methods of avoiding, trapping, and controlling pollutants. Used together these three methods will address the entire nutrient system. NRCS has approved a number of core and supporting practices (see table on page 2) to be included in the Initiative. These practice options will allow flexibility for producers in different States and/or with different types of agricultural operations while focusing resource and technological solutions on the primary goals of minimizing runoff and leaching, and reducing downstream nutrient loads.

Practice Selection Process

A team of NRCS technical specialists worked together to create the list of core practices that are the most important in reducing downstream loading of P and N in the Mississippi River Basin. State Conservationists were then asked to recommend supporting practices that would address the primary water quality concerns most effectively and efficiently within their State. NRCS technical specialists then reviewed and approved both the core and supporting practices, taking into consideration which practices would be the most effective at managing nutrients within fields to minimize runoff and loading of P and N to water bodies.

Ranking

To ensure efforts are targeted toward areas that will provide the greatest impact on nutrient runoff and leaching in the Mississippi River Basin, different ranking criteria for selecting proposed watersheds within States as well as criteria for choosing proposals will be advertised and adopted. The following ranking suggestions are general, and will require further refinement by each individual State.

Selecting Watersheds Within States

NRCS will give special consideration to proposed watersheds within States that

will have the largest impact on reducing downstream nutrient loads, including:

- Proposals that show the greatest promise for delivering applied conservation within the watershed focus areas as defined in step one.
- Proposals that target a 12-digit HUC watershed, or smaller, within the focus areas (the 8-digit watersheds chosen by States) and that leverage the non-Federal financial and technical resources that are coordinated with local, State, or Federal efforts.
- Proposals that will conduct work within a watershed that has an existing monitoring system to measure practice implementation outcomes.

Selecting Proposals

Although NRCS will not require a specific number of the approved core practices to be included in proposals, a higher priority will be assigned to proposals that will result in application of these core practices in a systems approach. NRCS will further develop scenarios to make practices more effective. The following items concerning practices may cause a proposal to be ranked higher than others:

- A proposal that includes multiple core practices selected from each of these categories: avoiding, controlling, and trapping.
- A proposal to implement one practice that will complete a system (i.e. one practice from each category) or will put additions onto a completed system.
- A proposal that includes drainage water management practices for land that is drained.

Payments

Payments through CCPI are for implementation of core and supporting conservation practices approved in the Field Office Technical Guide that assist the producer in meeting the goals of the MRBI. Payments are not authorized for activities or practice components which are solely production related and are not linked to an identified resource concern. Payments will be based on payment schedules for eligible conservation practices.

Payment schedules are based on the estimated cost incurred in performing or im-

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plementing conservation practices and/or the estimated income forgone by the producer. Forgone income includes the annual net income lost from a change in land use, or land taken out of production, or the opportunity cost of accepting less farm income in exchange for improved resource conditions resulting from the practice. Forgone income may be a one-time cost during the installation year, or may be an annual cost occurring after the installation year, such as taking land out of production.

Payment schedules documenting payment rates for the MRBI will be reasonably consistent across State lines, and States will coordinate the development of cost data for payment schedules for practices offered across State boundaries.

Payment schedules may account for the acquisition of technical knowledge associated with conservation implementation. This would include cash expenditures to obtain direct technical assistance, over and above what NRCS (or a similar) agency would typically provide. These expenditures could include costs to the land manager of acquiring technical knowledge, through an educational course, to operate, manage, or maintain a practice or activity that is "new" to the producer. These costs may also include hiring a technical consultant or specialist to assist in implementing the conservation practice.

Step Three: Additional Program Application

At this point in the process there exists a clearly defined watershed supported by local and State partners through an established program and agreement with NRCS. NRCS will now seek additional program opportunities to support the Initiative, including WREP and CIG.

Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP): WREP allows NRCS to enter into agreements with a state, non-government organization (NGO), or Tribe to carry out special projects that will advance the restoration, protection, or enhancement of wetlands on private and/or Tribal lands.

WREP will operate through a Request for Proposals in the Federal Register, much

like CCPI. Proposals will be submitted to the appropriate State Conservationist for initial review, and recommended proposals will be provided to the Chief by the State Conservationists for nationwide ranking and final selection.

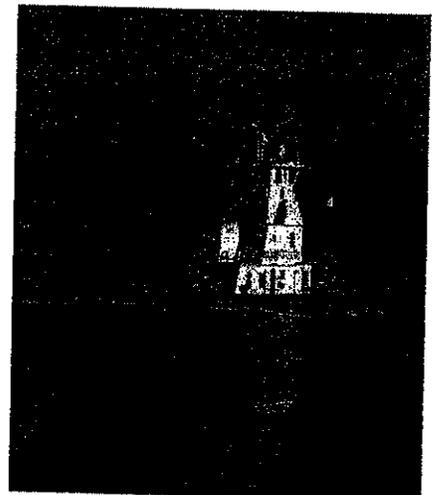
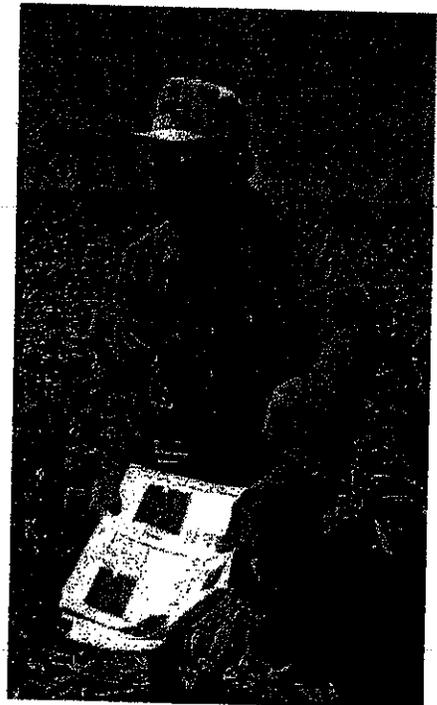
The WREP will offer opportunities for the restoration of wetland ecosystems. These wetlands can be used to filter surface waters near the watershed outlets, while providing additional resource benefits such as wildlife habitat.

WREP will facilitate opportunities that are identified within the MRBI's 12 states. WREP also provides an opportunity for implementing a reserved rights pilot, as authorized by the statute. Participants in the reserved rights pilot are subject to the general eligibility and program administration requirements of WRP. However, under the reserved rights pilot, landowners who wish to reserve grazing rights in the easement deed or 30-year contract must comply with an NRCS-approved WRP Plan of Operations that includes the location, timing, intensity, frequency, and duration of grazing.

NRCS intends to compile, evaluate, and make available aggregate information acquired through its monitoring of projects enrolled through WREP in general, and the reserved rights pilot specifically, to ascertain the benefits gained through these programmatic options.

As a part of this Initiative, NRCS will provide \$25 million in WREP in FY 2010-2013 in selected MRBI watersheds.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG): Similar to the Chesapeake Bay component of CIG, a special CIG will be designated for the MRBI with funding above and beyond CCPI and WREP. CIG affords a competitive opportunity to match funds and collaborate with non-federal agencies, NGOs, Tribes, and individuals on innovative projects (technologies and/or approaches) that will further the objectives of the Initiative. A designated funding pool of \$5 million annually through FY 2013 will be established to fund innovative projects related to nutrient management, drainage water management, bio-filters, market-based approaches to conservation on a watershed scale, and other high priority



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interest areas where field trials and demonstrations are needed and/or scaling up of previous proven research to a farm- or watershed-scale is desired.

Other Programs

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) will also provide opportunities for agricultural producers to participate in an on-farm nutrient monitoring program as a CSP enhancement, while providing beneficial data for measuring outcomes.

In addition to NRCS programs, many other Federal, State, and local programs could be focused on the designated watersheds. This could include the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and EPA's 310 Program. CRP includes the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and various Continuous CRP options.

Step Four: Implementation

For CCPI, WREP, and CIG, implementation will extend beyond the life of the current Farm Bill. This is because funds are obligated through contracts and agreements for multiple years. The number of new watersheds added each fiscal year through FY 2013 under CCPI will depend on how much of the new \$50 million each fiscal year is needed to meet prior year commitments in previously selected proposals.

Step Five: Outcome Measurement

Estimates of N and P load reductions will be required. The ability to determine the benefits of the practices applied through the MRBI is complicated by three primary factors:

- Establishing a baseline for the participating watersheds.
- The lag time between practice application and measurable results. Studies report this gap ranges from two to 15 years depending on the intensity of conservation efforts.
- The density and geographic location of acres treated, relative to the acres contributing to nutrient loading.

With a minimum of one 8-digit HUC for each of the 12 states, it is proposed that a tiered approach—at three scales utilizing a combination of monitoring data and modeled data—be used to validate

estimates of benefits from the Initiative. The scales and overview of actions are described below:

Field Scale: Validate Apex Model from on-farm and/or on an existing research facility. Part of the watershed assessment activities of CEAP may contribute as will monitoring data from partners such as state water quality agencies, the Agricultural Research Service and universities.

1. Gather existing field-scale research on the effects of practices that are applied through the Initiative.
2. Establish paired-comparison studies for selected practices or systems of practices.

Small Watershed Scale: 12-digit HUC monitoring.

1. Access data from CEAP watershed studies or existing monitoring data from partners such as state water quality agencies and universities. Compare results to modeled results using APEX and SWAT.
2. Partner with USGS and other water quality monitoring entities in 12-digit HUCs to establish a loading baseline. Concentrate practice implementation sufficient to cover a significant portion of cropland acres.

Large Watershed Scale: At the 8-digit HUC where practices will be applied in a focused manner (for example, targeting the most vulnerable acres for losses), run the SWAT model with APEX model estimates for acres treated. Utilize CEAP national assessment estimates and procedures for baseline and Initiative benefits at the large scale.

It will be necessary to establish monitoring criteria within the RFP specific to the type of monitoring activities conducted, number of sites per watershed at each scale, number of times monitoring activities will occur annually, reports provided to NRCS for data collection, and various other means to track N and P reduction throughout the watershed areas.

The smaller scale benefit validation will provide the science-based support for benefit estimates at the larger scales. Much of this work has been completed by CEAP and its watershed and national

assessment portions, but may need to be augmented by the above-stated activities.

Next Steps

In addition to providing input for watershed selection criteria and the processes used to implement the MRBI, partners will have a crucial role in encouraging and supporting producer participation. Partners' involvement will be key in a variety of ways, including:

- Providing information, education, and conducting outreach activities.
- Forming agreements to provide staffing for technical assistance and education.
- Assisting with monitoring, evaluation, and assessment.
- Joining the State Technical Committee to help provide input for focus area and watershed selection.
- Submitting proposals for CCPI, CIG and WREP or partnering with a group submitting a proposal.
- Targeting your agency's or organization's programs toward the Initiative's watersheds.

Specifically, interested partners at the national level are asked by September 30, 2009 to:

- Designate a point of contact for collaboration with NRCS.
- Provide NRCS a description of how it would like to collaborate (i.e., funding, technical assistance, outreach, etc.) with the MRBI.

Contact Information

Partner responses should be emailed to Thomas Christensen, Central Regional Conservationist, at thomas.christensen@wdc.usda.gov.

