



What's New with the NRCS NWQI this Year?

Association of State Drinking Water Administrators

April 30, 2020

About ASDWA

- ▶ **Mission:** To protect public health and the economy through the provision of safe drinking water
- ▶ **Members:** Drinking Water Program Administrators: 50 states, territories, the Navajo Nation, and the District of Columbia
 - ▶ **Public Water System Oversight**
 - ▶ Regulation
 - ▶ Technical assistance
 - ▶ Funding - DWSRF, set-asides
 - ▶ **Coordination with Multiple Partners**



Upcoming Webinars

- ▶ May 14 - ASDWA Webinar
 - ▶ *Thinking Bigger with Asset Management: There's Room for Source Water Protection*
- ▶ June 4 - SWC Webinar
 - ▶ *Updates from NRCS and the Northeast: Partnering to Protect Drinking Water*

Today's Webinar Purpose

- ▶ For state and EPA source water protection program staff
- ▶ Learn about this year's new NRCS National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) watershed selection guidelines for impaired waters and drinking water supply watersheds.

Agenda

- ▶ Martin Lowenfish, NRCS
 - ▶ NWQI Introduction
- ▶ Dee Carlson, NRCS
 - ▶ FY20 Changes to the SWP areas
 - ▶ FY21 Bulletin
- ▶ Karen Wirth, EPA
 - ▶ EPA Perspective on NWQI
 - ▶ Opportunities to Partner with State Water Quality Programs

After the Webinar



Please note that a video recording of today's webinar will be made available for viewing on ASDWA's web site within the next few days at

www.asdwa.org


Please Type In Your Questions!



- ▶ Please type your questions into the box on your webinar control panel.
- ▶ We will not be taking verbal questions.
- ▶ You may type in your questions at any time during the webinar.
- ▶ We will answer questions after all the presenters are finished speaking.



United States Department of Agriculture

A photograph of a stream flowing over dark, wet rocks. The water is white and frothy as it cascades down. In the background, there are green trees and foliage. The text "NATIONAL WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE (NWQI)" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font.

NATIONAL WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE (NWQI)

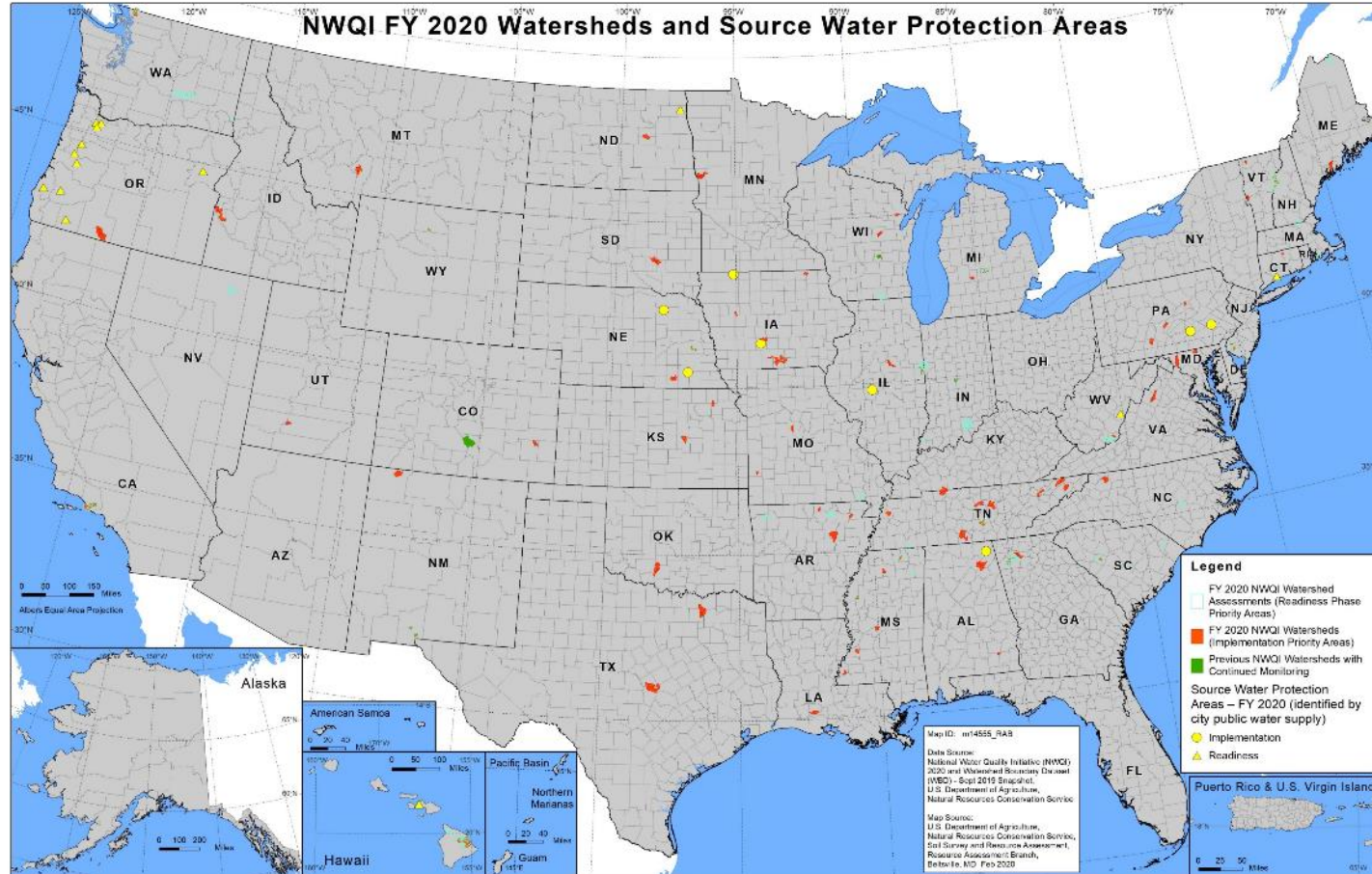
ASDWA Webinar
April 30, 2020

Area Wide Planning Branch

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)



Partnering with EPA, state water quality agencies and drinking water utilities for water quality improvement



National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)



- Initiated in 2012 in partnership with EPA
- Priority watersheds and source water protection areas (SWPAs) are selected in collaboration with state water quality and drinking water agencies, and water utilities
- NWQI addresses surface waters impaired under the Clean Water Act, with a focus on nutrients sediments and pathogens from agricultural sources.
- NWQI also protects/restores drinking water sources (both surface and ground water).
- Long-term goal of NWQI is to achieve water quality improvements through accelerated conservation practice implementation.



Expansion to Protect Drinking Water

- Original focus on addressing surface water bodies impaired under the Clean Water Act
- In FY2015 special consideration for watershed selection was provided if the impaired water body was a source of **drinking water**
- **In FY 2019, NWQI initiated a pilot to address source water protection (SWP), including surface and ground water sources**
 - SWP areas do not have to coincide with impaired, threatened, or critical waterbodies as determined by the state.
 - 16 SWP pilot projects in 9 states for FY19
 - Source water protection continues as a regular component of NWQI.



Criteria for Selection



- Watershed criteria - must be associated with a surface water body that is impaired or threatened
- Source water protection area (SWPA) criteria - no specific selection criteria, other than NRCS and drinking water partners agree is it a state priority

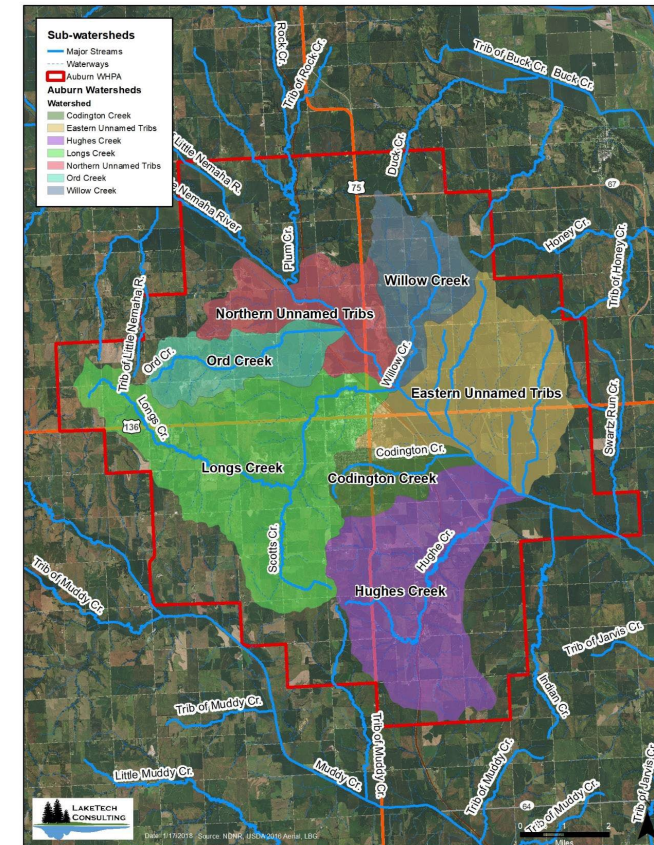
Additional NRCS considerations:

- Adequate technical capacity in the watershed or SWPA
- Existing network of partnering agencies
- Producer interest/sufficient density of eligible producers



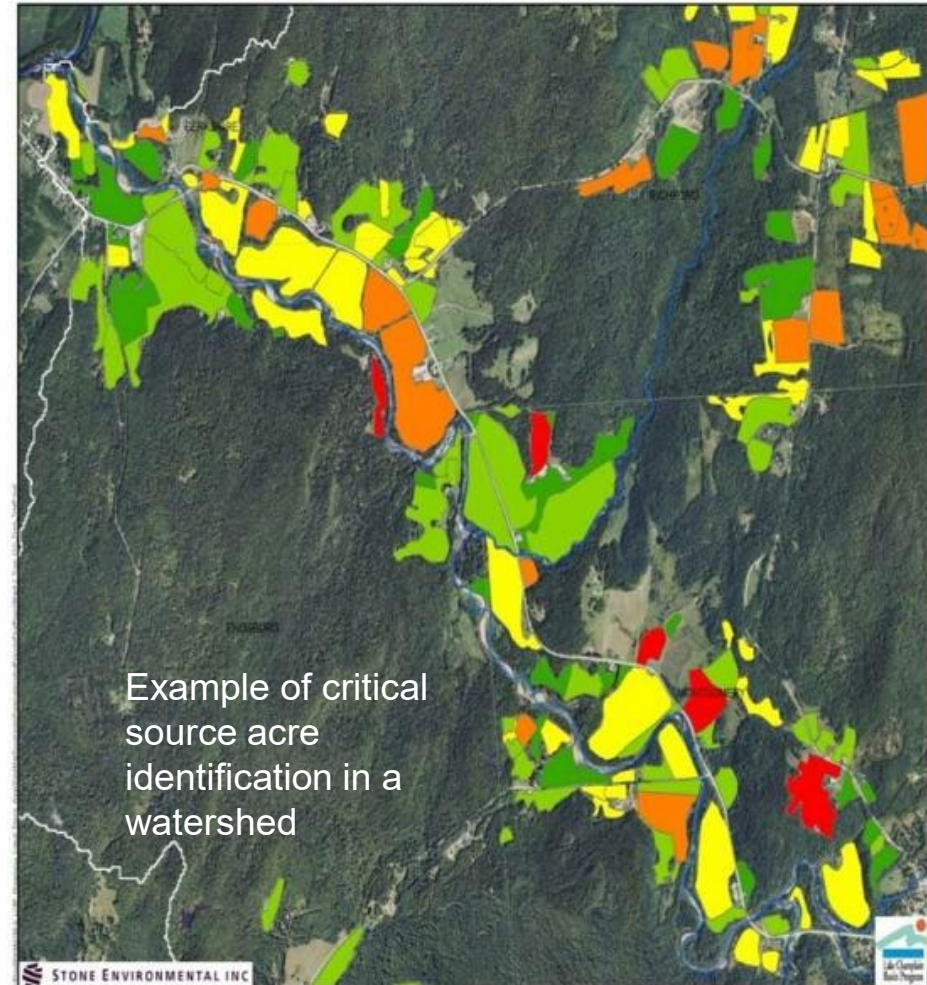
SWPAs - Delineation

- SWPAs can be for surface or ground water systems providing community drinking water
- The SWPA should be based on a delineation determined by the water utility and drinking water partner:
 - These delineations may be provided in Safe Drinking Water Act source water assessments or other assessments conducted by drinking water partners
 - The area for protection submitted for NWQI may be the entire SWPA or it may be a portion of the area
 - In some cases drinking water partners may choose to request an expanded area to more fully treat threats from agricultural land use
 - Where there are a number of small SWPAs (e.g. small wellhead protection areas) in an area, the relevant utilities and drinking water partners may choose to identify a single local protection area for NWQI that encompasses these protection areas
- NRCS does not make the delineation or provide assistance for modeling or other analyses to improve or modify protection area boundaries



Emphasis on Planning

- In FY 2017, a pilot project was initiated to develop watershed assessments and outreach plans prior to implementation funding (“readiness phase”)
 - Technical assistance funding provided to assist assessment development
 - Assessments identify and target critical source areas for treatment
 - Outreach strategies developed to engage producers
- The readiness (planning) phase was mainstreamed in FY 2018.



Tracking Progress



Long-term goal of NWQI is to achieve water quality improvements through accelerated conservation practice implementation at the small watershed scale or within SWPAs.

All NWQI projects will assess progress toward meeting water quality goals:

- When possible, select watersheds or SWPAs where baseline water quality monitoring data already exist
- Track implementation on the identified critical source areas within the watershed/SWPA
- Report on the specific metrics that were developed with partner input to demonstrate progress in meeting water quality goals
- Interim metrics are related to or surrogates for the water quality concerns (e.g., load reduction percentage, pounds of P prevented from leaving field, change in biotic integrity score, change in P index results weighted across the watershed, etc.)



NWQI Watershed Selection – Two Phases

1. Planning (Readiness) Phase

- New priority watersheds or SWPAs that need assessments can request the readiness phase
- Readiness watersheds/SWPAs are provided technical resources to assist with development of assessments and outreach strategies

2. Implementation Phase

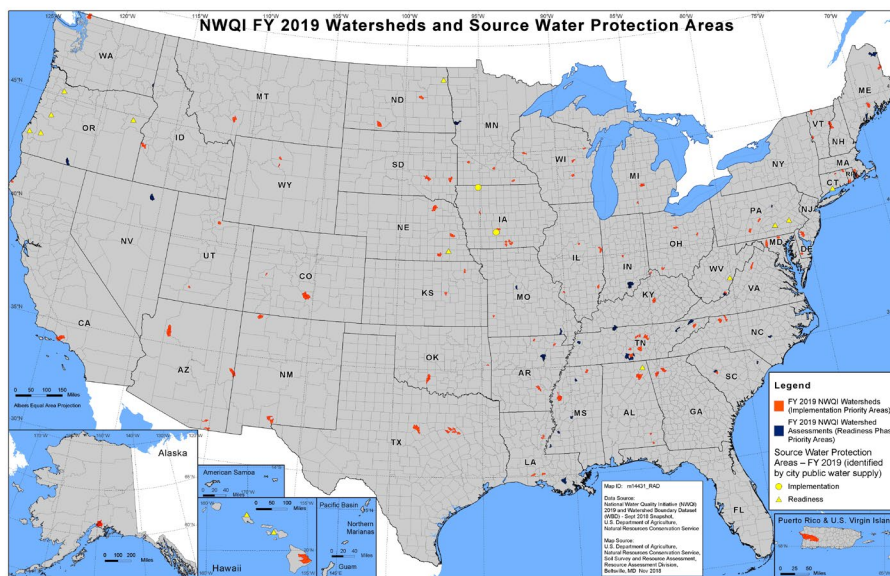
- Watershed/SWPA assessment is complete, ready for financial assistance for practice implementation
- The assessment must provide all elements outlined in the NRCS assessment guidance
- Multi-year budget and schedule of practice implementation required - “NRCS implementation plan”



Changes to NWQI in FY2020

In FY19 there were:

- 201 implementation watersheds
 - 156 of these lacked adequate assessment
- 62 readiness watersheds
- 16 SWPA pilot projects



New Requirements for FY20:

Significant changes were expected in watersheds for FY20 with the transition to new requirements:

- All NWQI watersheds and SWPAs must have a multi-year plan documenting projected activity and funding needs.
- All NWQI watersheds and SWPAs must have plans or assessments that inform the project implementation needs (including currently approved watersheds)

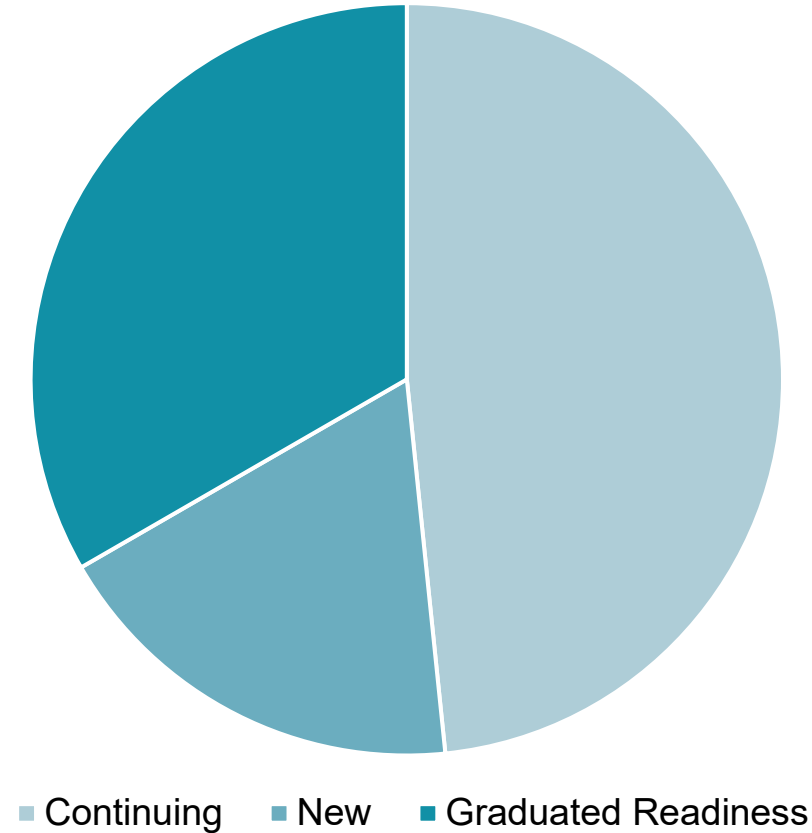


NWQI Watershed Changes in FY2020



Implementation Phase – “Regular” NWQI

FY20 Watersheds (153)



NWQI Watershed Changes in FY2020



Readiness Phase

97 total watersheds developing assessments in FY20 (21 states)

- 10 readiness phase watersheds carried over from FY19
- 48 watersheds were previously approved for NWQI prior to FY18 but did not have assessments – some have requested continuing FA in FY20 per the bulletin
- 39 watersheds requested are new to NWQI
- Several states have requested assistance with watershed assessments from an outside contractor through EPA



NWQI Changes in FY2020



Source Water Protection Areas

16 pilot projects in FY19:

- 4 SWPA projects moved from readiness to implementation in FY20
- 1 original project in Hawaii cancelled - NRCS could not address the land use identified as threat to source water
- 1 project from NE transferred to SWP from regular NWQI (implementation)

FY20 projects:

- 22 total projects across 10 states:
 - 8 in implementation
 - 14 in planning (readiness)
 - 6 new projects (OR, IL)



NWQI Changes for FY2021



NWQI bulletin posted on April 1 - Changes include:

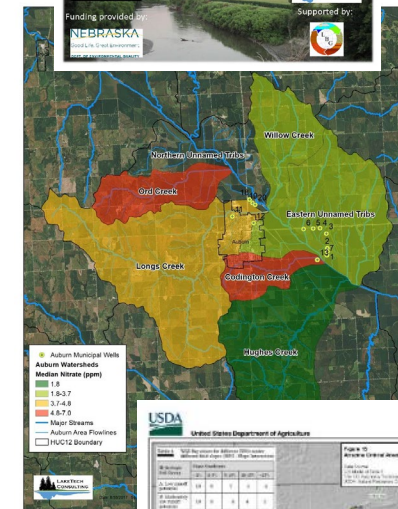
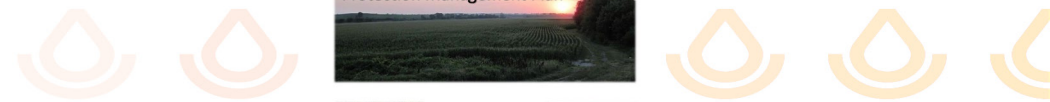
- Readiness phase will now be referred to as the **planning phase**
- Participation is required for all states.
 - Minimum participation is 3 watersheds (HUC-12) addressing an impaired or threatened water body.
 - **Source water protection is in addition to the minimum participation.**
 - Planning phase watersheds count towards the minimum.
- Funding changes
 - The three smallest projects (by dollar value) will be the basis for each state's NWQI request to National Headquarters.
 - A minimum representing 3% of state's General EQIP will be provided for NWQI.



Watershed or SWPA Assessments

NRCS state offices must provide an actionable plan or assessment that meets NWQI Guidance:

- Sufficient assessment to guide the siting and implementation of conservation practices for greatest water quality benefit
- Identification of critical source areas within watersheds/SWPAs for identified pollutants of concern
- Established goals/objectives for water quality improvement, with specific metrics that can establish progress towards these goals
- Outreach strategies for implementation on vulnerable acres
- These assessments can be in any format and information can be provided in multiple documents



BMP Cost (NRCS 2017)	Grass Waterways Cost	Waterway Cost	Cove Crop	Total
	\$24,644	141		\$5188.26
Northern	4.8	\$24,644	141	\$5188.26
Ord	9.8	\$50,586	146.4	\$11,109.3
Longs	14.3	\$73,932	556.4	\$45,924
Hughes	16.5	\$85,606	769.7	\$63,530
Codrington	4.8	\$24,644	60.1	\$4,957
Eastern	18.5	\$95,983	384.9	\$31,771
Willow	21.3	\$110,254	126.5	\$10,439
Totals	89.8	\$485,646	2185.3	\$180,371
Grand Total				\$1,525,366

Natural Resources Conservation Service



NWQI SWPA Assessments



- **NWQI assessments are NOT the same as SWPA assessments developed for the Safe Drinking Water Act**
- SDWA SWPA assessments may contain many of the elements specified in NWQI assessment guidance
- NWQI assessment guidance is compatible with the AWWA G300 standard for source water protection:
 - Scope and purpose
 - Characterization of SWPA and source water condition
 - Goals and objectives
 - Action plan to mitigate threats – prioritization
 - Implementation schedule
 - Evaluation
- Agricultural land use details may be lacking



Multi-Year NWQI Implementation Plan

Required for NWQI watersheds and SWPAs

- Developed by NRCS (with assistance from partners) – spreadsheet template
- Based on information from the watershed/SWPA assessment or plan
- Includes information on:
 - Watershed/SWPA characteristics
 - **Proposed budget by year**
 - Conservation systems that will be used and list of practices planned to be implemented each year
 - Metrics that will be used to measure progress
 - **Identified critical source areas**
 - Producer interest and partner involvement/assistance



Accelerated Timeframe for FY2021 and Beyond

- NRCS states need to know their approved NWQI watersheds/SWPAs before they conduct their resource assessments to determine their financial and technical needs for the upcoming FY.
- The release date and the due date for NWQI selection has been moved up this year – due date is July 3 for submissions for FY2021.
- We anticipate that the release date for the FY2022 NWQI bulletin will be significantly accelerated to allow more time for NRCS states to work with partners on watershed and source water protection area prioritization and submission.



Source Water Protection: Opportunities for Partnerships with The National Water Quality Initiative

Karen Wirth

April 30, 2020



**Association of State Drinking Water Administrators
Webinar “What’s New with the NRCS National Water
Quality Initiative this Year?”**



OFFICE OF GROUND WATER
AND DRINKING WATER

Bulletin Reflects Strong Support for the NWQI



All States Will Participate



Three-Watershed Minimum Per State




Dedicated Funding



Permanent Expansion to Include Source Water Protection

Opportunities for Collaboration & Shared Efforts

- 
-  Continued Emphasis on Planning
 -  Continued Technical Assistance from NRCS
 -  A Valuable Opportunity for State Water Programs to Engage with NRCS
 -  A Valuable Opportunity for State Water Quality and Source Water/Drinking Water Program Collaboration

NWQI Backgrounder

- Support the NWQI Program by familiarizing EPA, NRCS and state water quality and source water personnel with the NWQI program.
- The NWQI discussion guide includes:
 - ✓ NWQI History, overview, current status;
 - ✓ Structure of the initiative
 - ✓ Role of partners
 - ✓ Project implementation and requirements
 - ✓ Technical resources

Planning and Implementing Agricultural Water Quality Projects Through the National Water Quality Initiative



Project Partners Discussion Guide

Take Home Message



Come to the Discussion Prepared



Look for multiple benefits



Collaborate with Nonpoint Source Program





QUESTIONS?

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Questions and Discussion

Please type questions into the control panel.

After the Webinar



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