

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative

To improve the health of the Mississippi River Basin, including water quality and wildlife habitat, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service is developing the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative (MRBI). Through this new initiative, NRCS and its partners will help producers in selected watersheds implement conservation practices that avoid, control, and trap nutrient runoff; improve wildlife habitats; and maintain agriculture productivity.

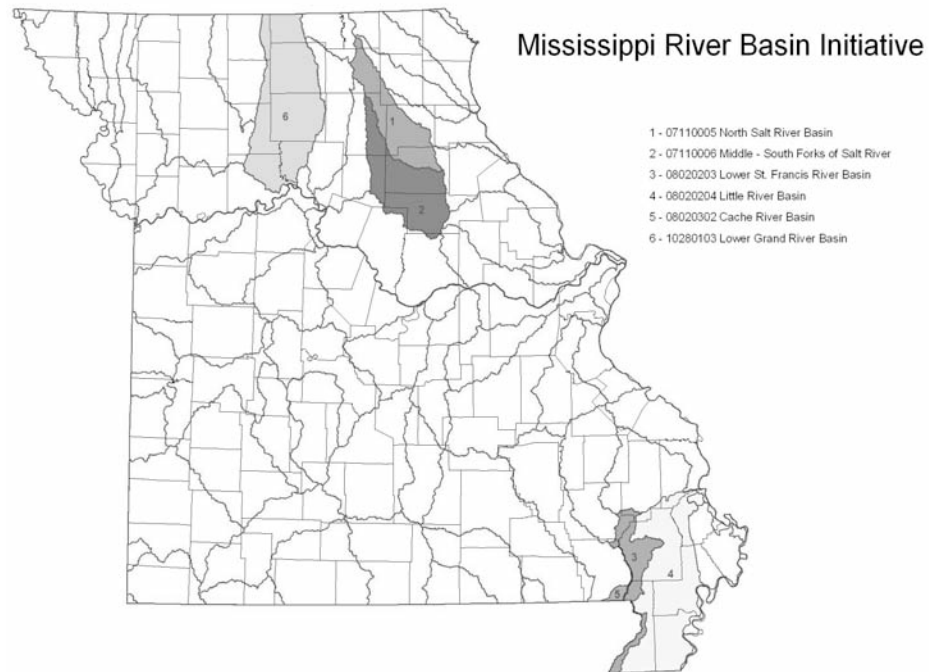
These improvements will be accomplished through a conservation systems approach to manage and optimize nitrogen and phosphorus within fields to minimize runoff and reduce downstream nutrient loading. NRCS will provide procedures assistance with a system of practices that will control soil erosion, improve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

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 nutrients loading in the Mississippi River Basin. Nutrients 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. The Missouri Watersheds that were chosen are: Cache; Lower St. Francis; Lower Grand; North Fork Salt; South Fork Salt; and Little River Ditches. MRBI will be implemented by NRCS through the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI), the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP), Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG), and other programs.

The Mississippi River Basin is a critical ecosystem to the United States. Its entire land mass, totaling 41 percent of the contiguous United States and 15 percent North America, drains into the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico.

The Mississippi River runs 2350 miles from its headwaters at Lake Itasca, Minnesota, to the mouth of the Gulf of Mexico, and carries an average of 436,000 tons of sediment each day. It takes about 90 days for water to travel from the headwaters in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, where water is discharged at an average rate of 600,000 cubic feet per second.

NRCS will offer this Initiative in fiscal years (FYs) 2010 through 2013, dedicating at least \$80 million in each fiscal year. This is in addition to funding by other Federal agencies, States and partners and the contribution of producers. Please see future news letters for more information on when this program will be available.



MDC Launches Buffer Initiative

The Missouri Department of Conservation, in cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, is currently launching a riparian (creek side) buffer initiative in the Lower Grand River Conservation Opportunity Area (COA).

The Conservation Opportunity Area consists of approximately 219,000 acres surrounding the lower Grand River and its tributaries, and lies in the counties of Livingston, Linn, Chariton, and Carroll. The Grand is classified as a prairie river, with a watershed that historically consisted of vast expanses of native grasslands, marshes, wet prairies, and bottomland forest.

A primary natural resource challenge within the COA is upstream soil erosion which has led to large silt, sediment and debris deposits. Other significant conservation issues include water pollution, invasive species, loss or ruin of riparian and wetland habitat, and Locust Creek rerouting into Higgins ditch.

Strategies to protect and restore the area have been developed and assistance from MDC and other conservation partners is available for the following: 1) restoration of stream habitat; 2) restoration and management of bottomland forests and woodlands; 3) management of wetlands and wet prairie habitats; 4) controlling populations of exotic and invasive plants (such as reed canary grass, purple loosestrife); and 5) educating landowners about the importance of conservation practices.

The purpose of this initiative is to assist landowners in the COA with achieving their land-use objectives in ways that enhance natural resource and wildlife benefits. A primary target of the initiative is to restore woodland, wetland, and grass buffers along tributaries of the lower Grand River.

Buffers filter sediment and nutrients from surface runoff, slow runoff and increase infiltration, stabilize stream banks, and enhance aquatic and wildlife habi-

tat. Buffers are generally planted to a combination of trees, shrubs, and/or grasses, but may also include wet prairies, marshes, and wetlands.

Financial assistance and payments to establish buffers are available to eligible landowners through a variety of programs:

- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP)

For landowners, CCRP is generally the most appealing program and offers **excellent financial incentives** to install desirable conservation practices on cropland or certain marginal pastureland. Payments may include:

- 50% cost-share reimbursement for establishment
- 40% practice incentive payment
- An up-front sign-up bonus
- Annual soil rental payment
- Additional 20% of the soil rental rate for buffers

installed on cropland.

The following CCRP practices are generally the most applicable:

- CP-9 shallow water area
- CP-21 grass filter strip
- CP-22 riparian forest buffer
- CP-23 wetland restoration
- CP-29 marginal pasture wildlife buffer
- CP-30 marginal pasture wetland buffer
- CP-33 habitat for upland birds
- CP-31 bottomland timber restoration

Check with your county USDA Service Center for eligibility and details.

Future plans for the Lower Grand COA initiative include a direct mailing of informational materials to all COA private landowners in February, and an "open house" meeting with resource agencies in March for landowners to discuss individual farm management concerns and learn about available programs.

Lower Grand COA

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