

State Technical Committee Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Subcommittee Meeting
May 31, 2016
Kentucky NRCS State Office
Lexington, Kentucky

The purpose of this subcommittee meeting is to receive input for the fiscal year 2017 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The meeting convened at 1:30 p.m., with Kate Little, NRCS Resource Conservationist, conducting a presentation on EQIP subaccounts, ranking questions, and pooling areas. The presentation is found at the end of these notes. The questions and input received from the attendees is recorded below.

Kate asked if the current pooling areas adequate, or do we need to go back to the previous 14 pooling areas? The general consensus was that there is no need to return to the previous model. The current model serves the purpose adequately.

It was brought up that two of the EQIP ranking questions, 1h and 1i in the pastureland field ranking sheet, cause concern. 1h speaks only to ground water when it says "wellhead protection" and "karst". If you are trying to protect drinking water sources, you would need to broaden the question to include surface water, too. However, that would require the use of some definition of proximity to a drinking water source. Kentucky Division of Water (DOW) has a layer of how far removed from an actual drinking water intake source, where waterways are listed by how many "steps removed from source" they are. Also, question 1i addresses only impaired waters. However, once they are tested, virtually all waters in the state show up as impaired. All that question does, is indicate where testing has occurred so far. A more accurate indicator might be the "special use waters" layer or "watershed planning areas" layer that are available from DOW, and are updated every two years. NRCS will work with DOW to see what can be improved for these ranking questions.

Additionally, the Northern Kentucky region may not be getting the funding they have in the past. DOW is using some 319 money to try to fill in where EQIP isn't funding important water quality projects.

Kate mentioned that the StrikeForce Initiative question in the ranking tool may be causing the issue of Northern Kentucky not receiving as many contracts as they are not StrikeForce counties. In the past two years, since that question was added, it appears that the Boone/Kenton area may be scoring lower than in the past. There is the option of adding local questions about whether the application is in a specific physical region; that could help replace the points not received in the StrikeForce question. She also mentioned that we could look at the option of entering those applications, as applicable, in the Managing Poo Regional Cooperative Conservation Program (RCPP) subaccount.

Next, Kate informed the group that the Wildlife field ranking sheet will need to be changed. This is due to questions using acres, rather than a percentage of the operation. The use of acres is perceived as a barrier to those producers with small acreage.

It was asked if the Southeast Kentucky Early Successional Habitat (SEKESH) counties could be adjusted (enlarged)? Kate responded that with good justification, NRCS would look at this.

It was asked if there are specific questions regarding bat habitat? The answer was that there are not specific questions regarding bat habitat, but a number of the questions address habitat that bats would use.

It was noted that Kentucky Division of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) has maps for Indiana Bat focus areas and USFWS has maps on its website showing some areas of focus for Northern Longear Bat, but they are found statewide. There are several issues that need to be a part of the planning process, such as habitat connectivity, timing of practices being implemented, location of habitat being created on the landscape, and unintentional creation of habitat by implementation of seemingly unrelated practices. KDFWR mentioned that there are good habitat things happening through EQIP, but there are no specific questions related to bat habitat. Kentucky Division of Forestry (KDF) said that the Technical Assistance Request (TAR) that is provided to NRCS by KDF has information related to bats and bat habitat included on it, and NRCS should be using that in the planning process.

US Fish and Wildlife Service mentioned that timberstand improvement (TSI) needs to have good regeneration after it is completed, so it doesn't end up back in Bush Honesuckle and P. Calleryana.

The Nature Conservancy asked if a pollinator question could be added to the PA1 Crop subaccount. Kate said NRCS will look into that. They also asked about adding the practice "Denitrifying Bioreactor" and said that it is being used in other states. Kate said she wasn't sure if it is available in our region, but will look into that.

Someone noted that it seems like the early EQIP cutoff comes prior to the field offices getting guidance, and therefore few field visits occur prior to spring. The field doesn't like to conduct all of the field visits prior to receiving annual guidance.

KDF mentioned that the cutoff is very early in relation to when the foresters are getting requests for service. It puts them in a very tight time situation. Kate said NRCS will send reminders to the field to submit the requests to foresters or liaisons timely so they don't cause a problem for the foresters.

The Kentucky Woodland Owners Association (KWOA) asked how NRCS decides how much money goes into each account. Kate responded that the State Conservationist makes the ultimate decision with State Office Programs Staff input. NRCS is working on updating a formula to make initial allocations.

KWOA also asked what percent of applications are approved. Kate responded that in FY 2015, 28 percent of EQIP applications were contracted with \$10 million in EQIP funding. In 2016, there are over 3,000 applications and about \$13 million in funding. Additional funding may come later in the year.

There being no more questions or discussion, the meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

Attendees

Danny Hughes – Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources

Dan Figert – Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources

Pam Snyder – Kentucky Division of Forestry

Rachel Martin – The Nature Conservancy

Jacob Bowman – Farm Service Agency

Frank Hicks – Kentucky Woodland Owners Association

Jim Roe – Kentucky Division of Water

Brent Harrel – United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Matt Hutchison – NRCS

Kate Little – NRCS

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM

EQIP



WHAT'S THE PROGRAM OBJECTIVE?

- UNDER EQIP, NRCS PROVIDES TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO IMPLEMENT CONSERVATION PRACTICES IN A MANNER THAT PROMOTES AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, FOREST MANAGEMENT, AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AS COMPATIBLE GOALS; OPTIMIZE CONSERVATION BENEFITS; AND HELP AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS MEET FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL REQUIREMENTS.

NATIONAL PROGRAM PRIORITIES

- REDUCTIONS OF NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION, SUCH AS NUTRIENTS, SEDIMENT, PESTICIDES, OR EXCESS SALINITY IN IMPAIRED WATERSHEDS, CONSISTENT WITH TOTAL DAILY MAXIMUM LOADS (TMDLS), WHERE AVAILABLE; THE REDUCTION OF SURFACE AND GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION; AND REDUCTION OF CONTAMINATION FROM AGRICULTURAL POINT SOURCES, SUCH AS ANIMAL FEEDING OPERATIONS (AFO)
- CONSERVATION OF GROUND AND SURFACE WATER RESOURCES THAT RESULT IN WATER SAVINGS

NATIONAL PROGRAM PRIORITIES

- REDUCTION OF ON-FARM EMISSIONS, SUCH AS PARTICULATE MATTER, NITROGEN OXIDES, VOLATILE ORGANIC COMPOUNDS, AND OZONE PRECURSORS AND DEPLETERS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO AIR-QUALITY IMPAIRMENT VIOLATIONS OF NATIONAL AMBIENT AIR QUALITY STANDARDS OR OTHER STATE OR LOCAL AIR QUALITY REGULATIONS
- REDUCTION IN SOIL EROSION AND SEDIMENTATION FROM UNACCEPTABLE LEVELS ON AGRICULTURAL LAND
- ON-FARM ENERGY CONSERVATION
- PROMOTION OF AT-RISK SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION INCLUDING DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF WILDLIFE HABITAT

PRIORITIES, FUND ACCOUNTS AND RANKING

- EQIP INCLUDES MANY SPECIAL FUND ACCOUNTS THAT OFFER DIFFERENT CONSERVATION PRACTICES BASED ON THEIR OBJECTIVE (PASTURE MANAGEMENT, SOIL EROSION, WILDLIFE, WATER QUALITY, FORESTRY MANAGEMENT, ETC.)
- WE DEVELOP STATE AND LOCAL RANKING QUESTIONS FOR EACH FUND ACCOUNT TO HELP DETERMINE WHICH APPLICATIONS ARE BEST ADDRESSING PROGRAM PRIORITIES SO WE CAN BETTER ALLOCATE THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE WE RECEIVE.

FUND ACCOUNTS

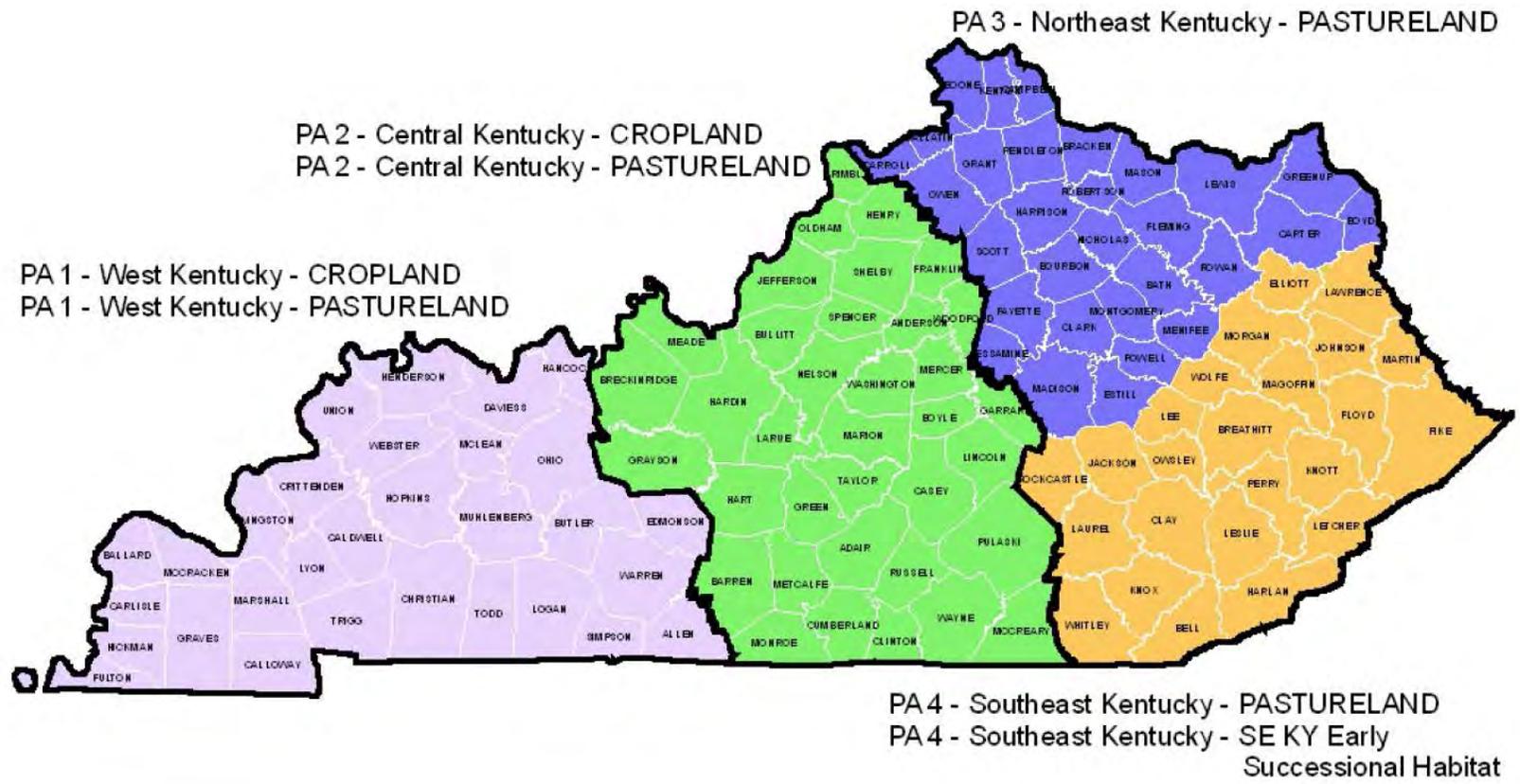
- WE CURRENTLY HAVE 28 EQIP FUND ACCOUNTS, NOT INCLUDING RCPP-EQIP ACCOUNTS

State Initiatives	General EQIP	MRBI	NWQI	Joint Chief's Initiative
Area 1 High Tunnel System Initiative	PA1 Pastureland	Red River	Mocks Branch	Triplett Creek
Area 2 High Tunnel System Initiative	PA 1 Cropland	Southeast Lower Green	Clarks Run	
Area 3 High Tunnel System Initiative	PA 2 Pastureland	Central Lower Green	Cane Run	
Beginning Farmer	PA 2 Cropland	Upper Buck Creek		
Limited Resource Farmer	PA 3 Pastureland			
Socially Disadvantaged Farmer	PA 4 Pastureland			
Organic Transition	CAP General			
Certified Organic	CAP General - CNMP			
On-Farm Energy				
Southeast KY Early Successional Habitat Initiative (SEKESH)				
Wildlife				
Forestland				

FUND ACCOUNTS

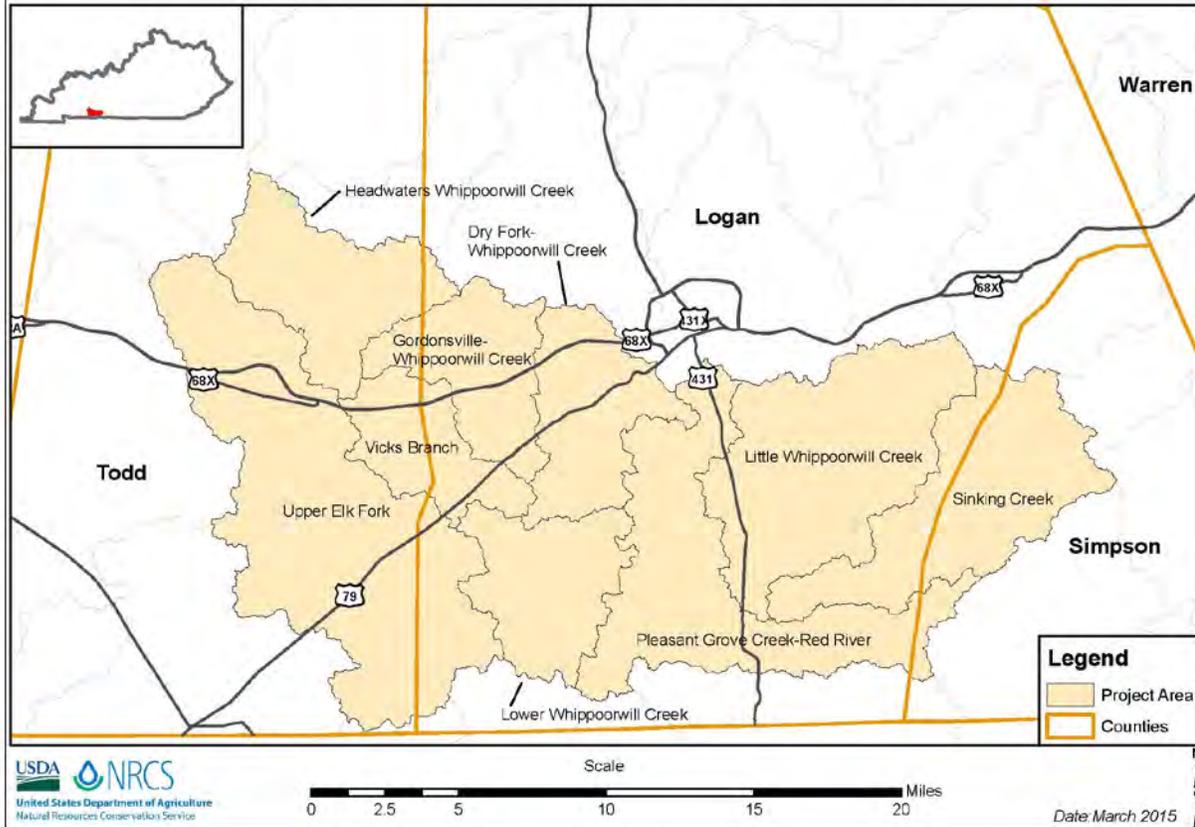
- PRIOR TO 2013 WE HAD SMALLER GENERAL EQIP POOLING AREAS
- MORE ALIGNED WITH OUR CURRENT WORK UNIT LOCATIONS
- ANALYZED PERCENTAGE OF APPLICATIONS FUNDED PER WORK UNIT 2011-2016
- FOUND THAT THE DECREASE IN NUMBER OF POOLING AREAS HAD NO NOTICEABLE EFFECTS ON FUNDING PERCENTAGES PER WORK UNIT

EQIP Pooling Areas 2016

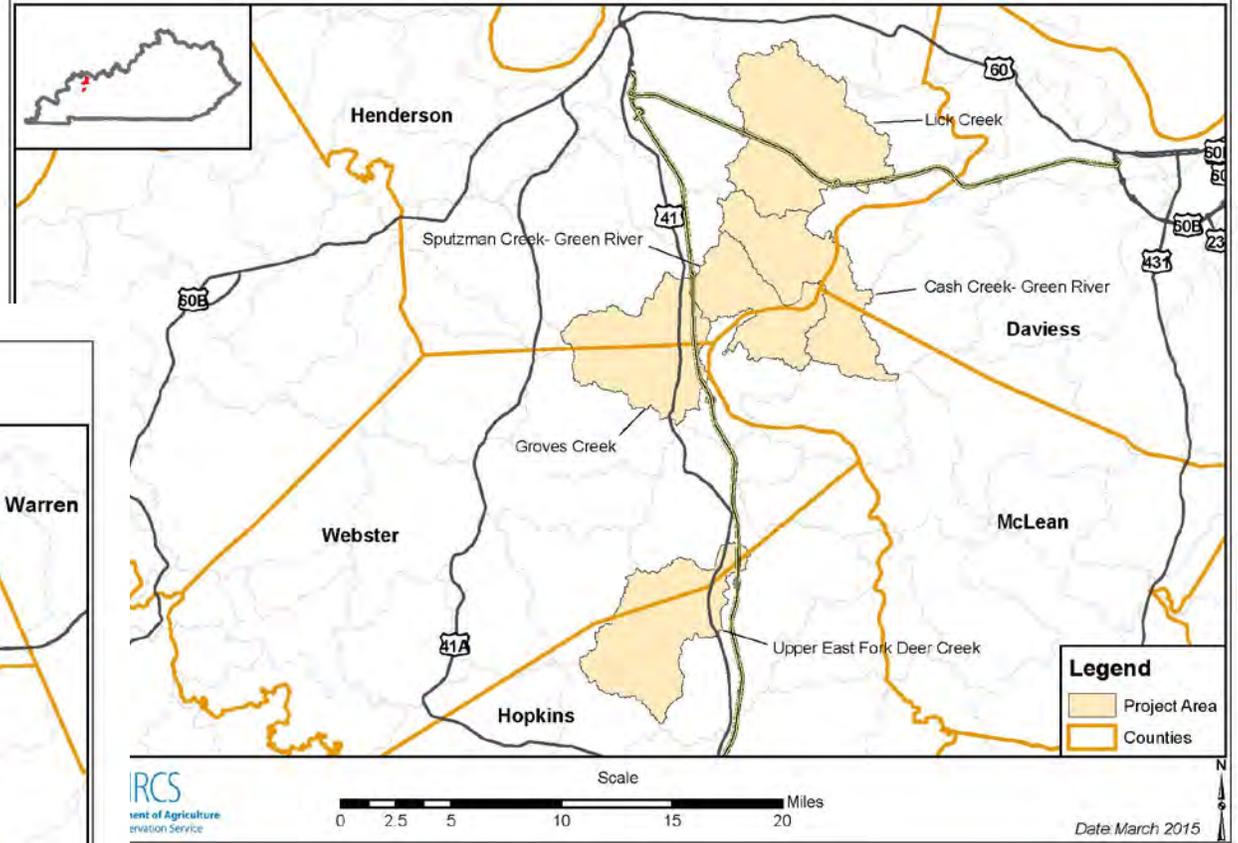


EXISTING MRBI WATERSHEDS

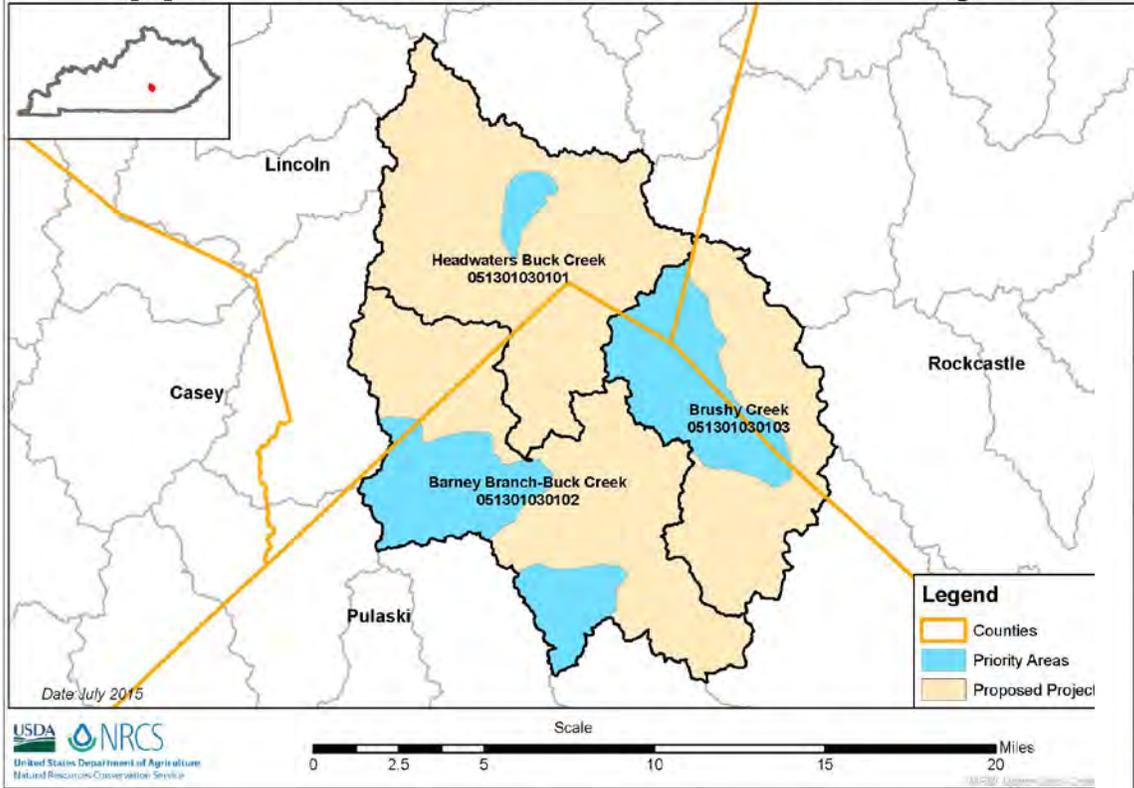
Red River MRBI Project Area



SE Lower Green MRBI Project Area

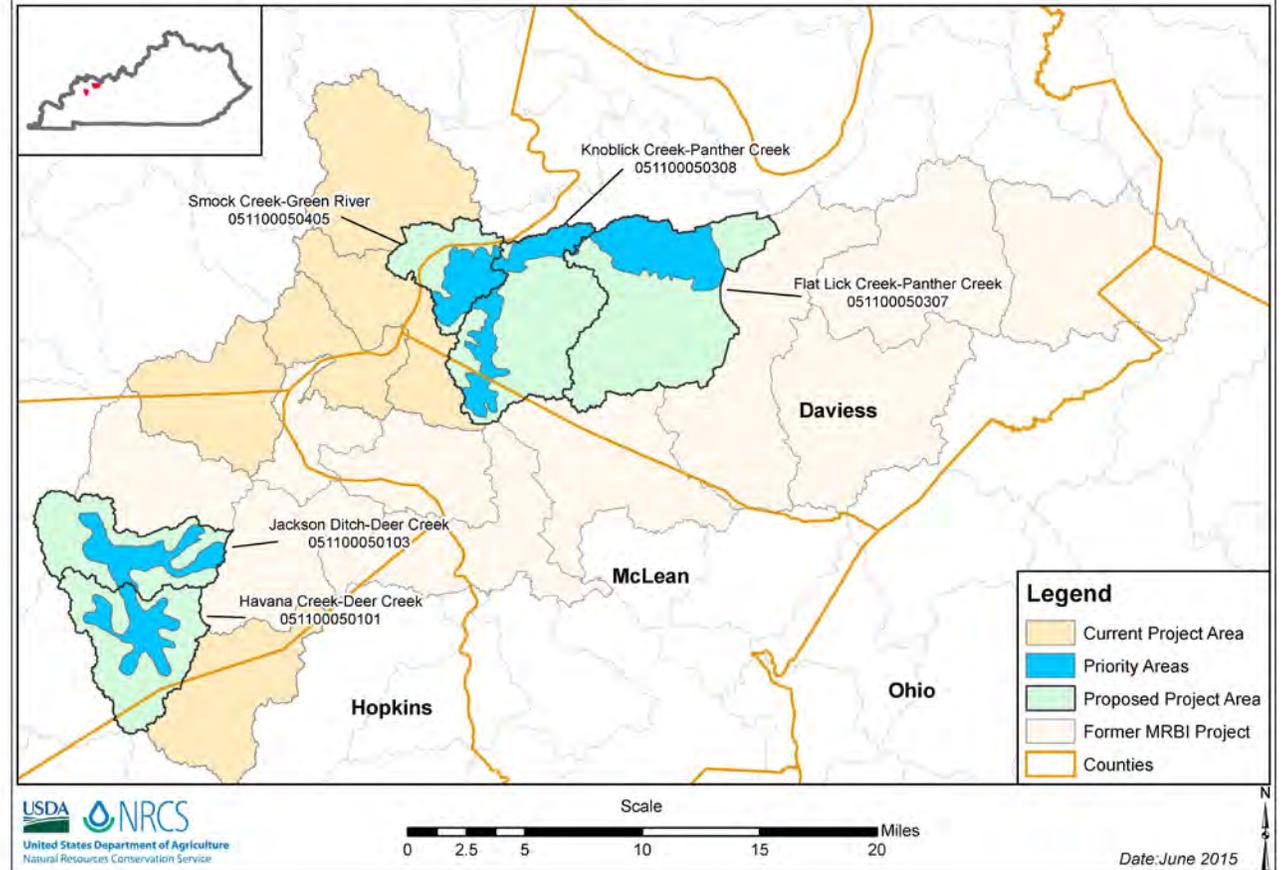


Upper Buck Creek Watershed Project



NEW MRBI WATERSHEDS

Central Lower Green MRBI Project Area

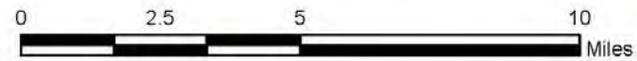
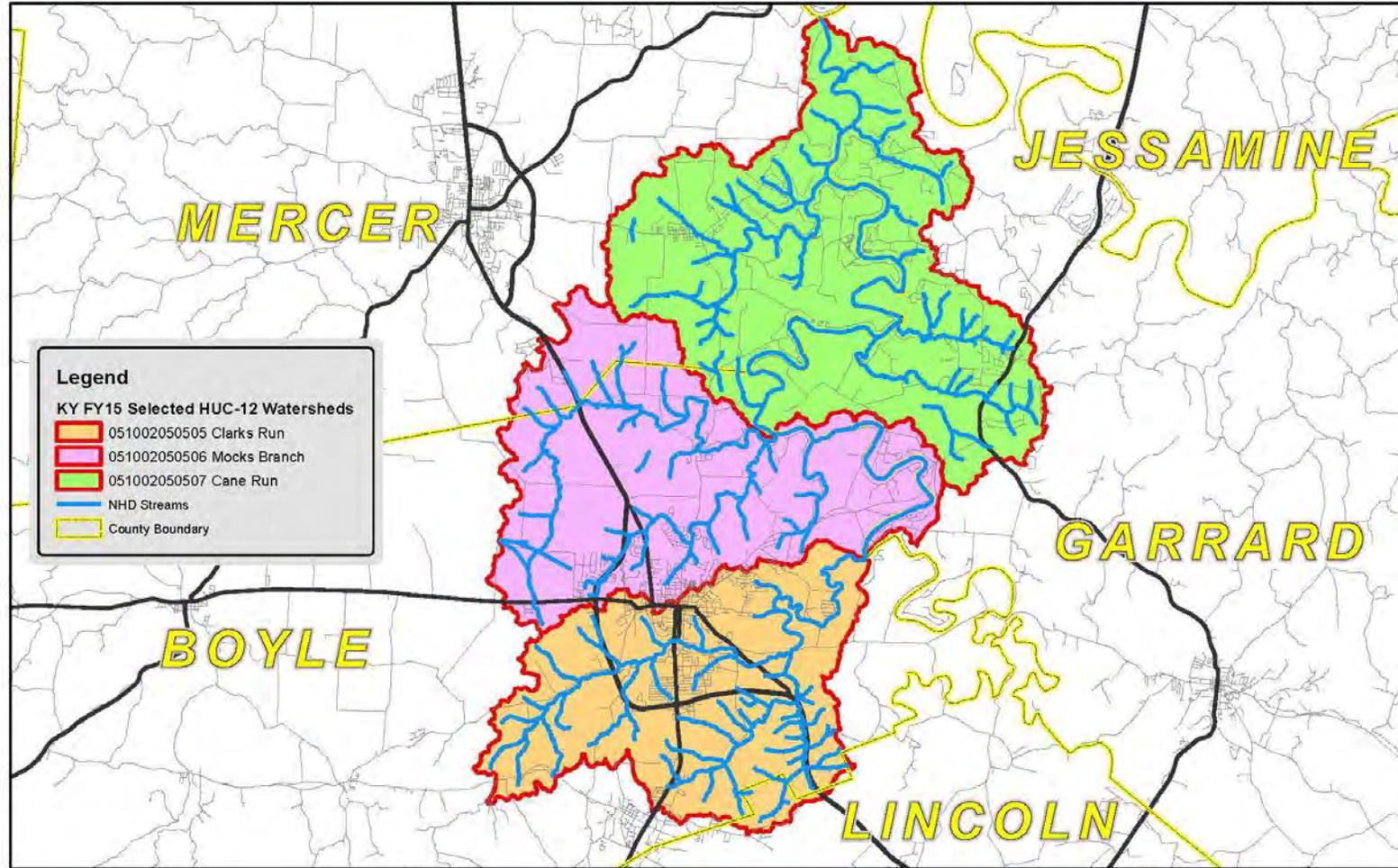


National Water Quality Initiative

Selected Watersheds - Clarks Run, Mocks Branch, & Cane Run

Boyle, Mercer, Garrard, & Lincoln Counties, KY

March, 2016



JOINT CHIEF'S INITIATIVE PROJECT AREA IN TRIPLETT CREEK WATERSHED

Project Area

Date: 4/16/2014

Agency: USDA - NRCS

Assisted By: TONY BURNETT



Legend

- USA Counties (below 1:3m)
- huc12s_a_Triplett-Creek-Project-Area
- Rowan County Boundary



FUND ACCOUNT REQUIREMENTS

- NATIONALLY WE ARE REQUIRED TO:
 - HAVE AN ORGANIC, ENERGY, SEASONAL HIGH TUNNEL, BEGINNING FARMER, SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED, MRBI, NWQI, AND JOINT CHIEF'S INITIATIVE FUND ACCOUNT
 - SPEND 5 PERCENT OF OUR ANNUAL ALLOCATION ON BEGINNING FARMER APPLICANTS
 - SPEND 5 PERCENT OF OUR ANNUAL ALLOCATION ON SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED APPLICANTS
 - SPEND 5 PERCENT OF OUR ANNUAL ALLOCATION ON WILDLIFE APPLICANTS
 - SPEND 60 PERCENT OF OUR ANNUAL ALLOCATION ON LIVESTOCK APPLICATIONS
 - ALLOCATE MRBI, NWQI AND JOINT CHIEF'S INITIATIVE ALLOCATIONS TO THEIR RESPECTIVE ACCOUNTS

FUND ACCOUNTS FLEXIBILITY

- WE CHOOSE TO OFFER THE FOLLOWING SPECIAL EMPHASIS INITIATIVES
 - SEKESH AND WILDLIFE (HELP US TO ALLOCATE OUR 5% TO WILDLIFE APPLICATIONS)
 - FORESTLAND
- WE CAN SELECT OUR POOLING AREA BOUNDARIES
- WE CAN DECIDE HOW MUCH ALLOCATION GOES TO EACH OF THESE ACCOUNTS

RANKING QUESTIONS

- RANKING QUESTIONS VARY FOR EACH FUND ACCOUNT
- RANKING QUESTIONS FOR INITIATIVES ARE DEVELOPED TO TARGET THE INITIATIVE OBJECTIVES
- THE POOLING AREA, BEGINNING FARMER, LIMITED RESOURCE PRODUCER AND SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED STATE ACCOUNTS WILL HAVE THE SAME STATE RANKING QUESTIONS, BUT LOCAL RANKING QUESTIONS WILL VARY BASED ON WHAT THE LOCAL WORK GROUP DECIDED TO TARGET
- NATIONAL QUESTIONS = 250 PTS
- STATE QUESTIONS = 400 PTS
- LOCAL QUESTIONS = 250 PTS
- PRACTICE EFFICIENCY = 100 PTS
- TOTAL POINTS = 1000

RANKING QUESTIONS

- LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE CURRENT RANKING QUESTIONS

OPEN DISCUSSION

- ARE WE FOCUSING ON THE RIGHT PRIORITIES (RESOURCE CONCERNS)?
 - DO WE NEED TO ADD ANY SPECIAL EMPHASIS ACCOUNTS?
 - ARE POOLING AREA LINES OK?
 - DO WE NEED TO EDIT OR ADD RANKING QUESTIONS?
 - ARE THERE CONSERVATION PRACTICES WE NEED TO OFFER THAT WE DON'T CURRENTLY?
 - MUST BE AVAILABLE NATIONALLY FOR US TO ADOPT IN KY