



Natural Resources Conservation Service
230 North First Avenue, Suite 509
Phoenix, Arizona 85003
Voice (602) 280-8801
Web: <http://www.az.nrcs.usda.gov>

News Release

Contact:
Valentino Reyes
(602) 280-8780

USDA Invests \$33 Million to Improve Water Quality in High-Priority Watersheds

PHOENIX, December 7, 2016 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack yesterday announced an investment of more than \$33 million in 197 high-priority watersheds across the country to help landowners improve water quality through the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI).

The NWQI helps farmers and ranchers implement voluntary conservation practices, such as nutrient management, cover crops, conservation cropping systems, and buffers, which protect and improve water quality where it is needed most. Conservation practices enhance agricultural productivity and profitability while also improving water quality by enhancing soil health and optimizing the use of agricultural inputs.

This year, NRCS added 42 new watersheds across the nation to the NWQI and selected 21 watersheds for new assessment projects, including five watersheds in Arizona. These assessment watershed projects span 17 states and include a variety of land uses and water quality issues. NRCS will provide resources for these assessment projects to leverage existing plans, data, and information, and fill gaps needed to complete watershed assessments and develop outreach plans. Experience and data gained from several studies, including the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), have shown that improvements in water quality are more likely to be detected when conservation systems are placed in the most vulnerable areas of a watershed.

The goal of the NWQI is to implement conservation practices within a local area to protect water bodies within priority watersheds. NRCS works closely with conservation partners and State water quality agencies to select watersheds where on-farm conservation can deliver the greatest benefits for clean water. State water quality agencies also work to align U.S. Environmental Protection Agency funding with these priority watersheds.

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