

National Water Quality Initiative Fact Sheet

Massachusetts: Overview

Through the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering financial and technical assistance to farmers and forest landowners interested in improving water quality and aquatic habitats in priority watersheds with impaired streams.

NRCS will help producers implement conservation and management practices through a systems approach to control and trap nutrient and manure runoff. Qualified producers will receive assistance for installing conservation practices such as cover crops, filter strips and terraces.

For over 75 years, NRCS has provided agricultural producers with assistance to implement voluntary conservation practices that protect natural resources while maintaining production and profits.

Massachusetts' Priority Watershed: Palmer River

The Palmer River flows through the towns of Rehoboth and Swansea in southeastern Massachusetts, then into eastern Rhode Island. The Environmental Protection Agency includes the river on its list of impaired waters for nutrients and bacteria.

The Palmer River subwatershed, which is within the Narragansett Bay watershed, is approximately 33,193 acres or 51 square miles in area, 96 percent of which is in Massachusetts.

Land in the subwatershed is 62 percent forested. Developed land accounts for 19 percent of the total land area and impervious surfaces such as rooftops, roads and parking lots, cover eight percent. About 10 percent of the watershed is agricultural land.



Rehoboth, Massachusetts farmland. About 10 percent of the Palmer River watershed is agricultural land. photo by Diane Petit, NRCS

The type of land use in a watershed has a direct effect on water quality. Pollutants, such as nutrients and bacteria from leaking septic systems, oil from automobiles, and sediment from construction, run off impervious surfaces, negatively affecting nearby water bodies. Agricultural materials, such as fertilizer and manure, can also contribute pollutants.

The National Water Quality Initiative will work in selected watersheds to help farmers, ranchers and forest landowners improve water quality and aquatic habitats in impaired streams.

The Palmer River supports one of the few small stream American shad fisheries in the Commonwealth, as well as an increasingly important river herring fishery, and rainbow smelt and white perch populations.

Water piped from the Shad Factory Pond Dam into the Kickemuit Reservoir supplies drinking water for the residents of Barrington, Bristol, and Warren, RI.

Conservation Funding and Practices

NRCS conservation professionals will provide technical assistance and planning tools to determine which conservation actions will provide the best results to improve water quality on your land.

Nutrient management systems, erosion control, conservation tillage, pest management, and buffers systems are just some of the practices being offered as part of the National Water Quality Initiative.

To help install these conservation practices, financial assistance to share in the cost of these conservation practices is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Partnerships

NRCS identified priority watersheds through the help of local partnerships and state water quality agencies. Partners sometimes offer financial assistance in addition to NRCS programs. NRCS will continue to coordinate with local and state agencies, conservation districts, nongovernmental organizations and others to implement this initiative. This strategic approach will leverage funds and provide streamlined assistance to help individual agricultural producers act to reduce the flow of sediment, nutrients and other runoff into impaired waterways.

Producer Benefits

Water quality conservation practices benefit agricultural producers by lowering input costs and enhancing the productivity of working lands. Conservation investments are good for all Americans because well managed farms limit pollution from runoff, produce food and fiber, sustain rural economies, and provide food security to the Nation. All across the country—farmers, ranchers and forest landowners are voluntarily taking action and putting conservation on the ground to improve water quality on millions of acres!

Public Benefits

NRCS is proud to be involved in a nationwide effort with landowners and communities to improve and protect our water resources. The landowners and farmers participating in the initiative will receive conservation payments to work on the land in a sustainable way which provides cleaner water. In addition to the financial assistance, the land will remain productive into the future. Communities benefit by having clean waterways, safer drinking water and healthy habitat for fish and wildlife.

How to Apply

To get started, make an appointment at your local NRCS office to see if you are located in a selected watershed. You will need to establish eligibility and farm records for your land. NRCS will help you complete an application while explaining which conservation practices are available in your watershed.

All applications for possible funding, during fiscal year 2012, must be received by June 15, 2012.

For more Information

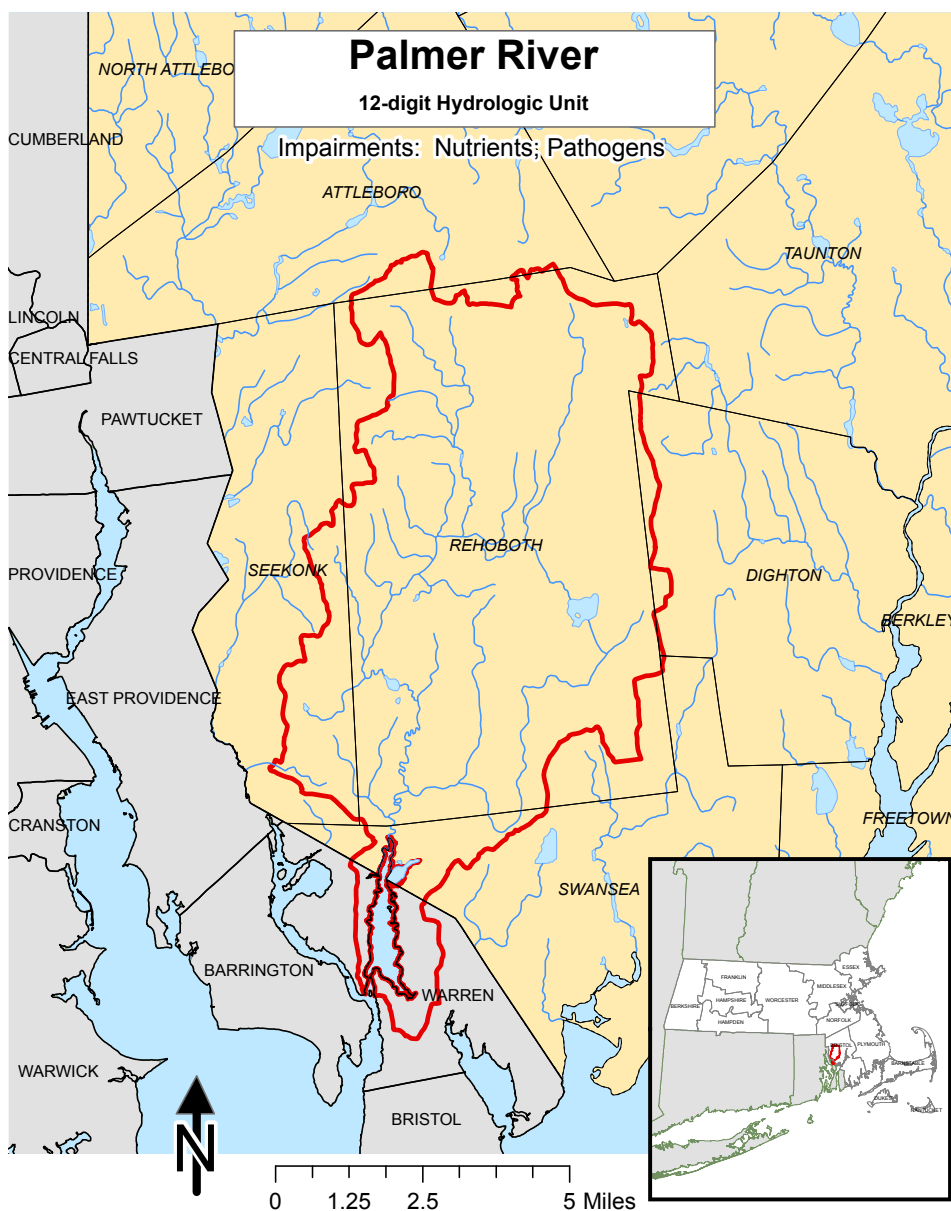
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The Palmer River watershed in southeastern Massachusetts.



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