



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

## Rhode Island State Office

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# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## NRCS Announces National Water Quality Initiative in Rhode Island

*Farmers and forest landowners located in the Sakonnet River, Tomaquag Brook-Pawcatuck River, and Upper East Passage watersheds should apply by June 15, 2012*

WARWICK, RI (May 15, 2012) State Conservationist R. Phou Vongkhamdy announced the launch of a new [National Water Quality Initiative](#) committed to improving three impaired watersheds in Rhode Island. The watersheds include the Sakonnet River, Tomaquag Brook-Pawcatuck River, and Upper East Passage. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will manage the initiative by making funds available to farmers and forest landowners in the selected watersheds.

"The Water Quality Initiative will further NRCS' partnership efforts to improve water quality using voluntary actions on private lands," R. Phou Vongkhamdy, NRCS Rhode Island State Conservationist said. "This initiative is a focused approach in areas facing significant natural resource challenges. It bolsters the positive results of landscape conservation initiatives NRCS and its partners already have underway."

Through this effort, eligible producers in the Sakonnet River, Tomaquag Brook-Pawcatuck River, and Upper East Passage watersheds will invest in voluntary conservation actions to help provide cleaner water for their neighbors and communities. The selected watersheds were identified with help from state agencies, partners, and the NRCS State Technical Committee.

Using funds from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), NRCS will provide funding and technical assistance to eligible producers and landowners for installing conservation practices such as nutrient management, animal waste systems, and riparian buffers to address agricultural sources of nutrients and bacteria runoff that contribute to the water quality impairment.

Farmers and forest landowners who would like to see if they are located in one of the three watersheds may reference the following interactive online map:

<http://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=8e068dead2184f6c95ad74737303034f>

Additionally, you may contact the NRCS Service Center Office at (401) 822-8848 to assess eligibility. General program information is available on the NRCS Rhode Island Web site at [www.ri.usda.gov](http://www.ri.usda.gov). NRCS accepts applications for financial assistance on a continuous basis throughout the year, but **applications for funding consideration during this fiscal year must be received by June 15, 2012.**

"American farmers are good stewards of the environment, especially when they have the tools they need to protect or improve fish and wildlife habitat and water quality," said NRCS Chief Dave White.

“We look forward to collaborating with producers in key watersheds to help them have a positive impact on streams with impaired water quality.”

The Sakonnet River and Upper East Passage are both subwatersheds of the Narragansett Bay watershed. The Sakonnet River watershed is approximately 35,761 acres of which 23 percent is forested and 14 percent is agricultural land. About 16 percent of the land is developed. The Upper East Passage watershed is approximately 18,552 acres of which 15 percent is forested and 7 percent is agricultural land. About 17 percent is developed land. The Tomaquag Brook-Pawcatuck River watershed is a subwatershed of the Upper Pawcatuck River watershed. The Tomaquag Brook-Pawcatuck River watershed is approximately 36,499 acres of which 75 percent is forested, 5 percent is agricultural land, and 11 percent is developed land.

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, sediment from construction, and run off from impervious surfaces negatively affect nearby water bodies. Agricultural materials such as fertilizer and manure can also contribute pollutants to a watershed. Streamside forest buffers provide an opportunity in removing excess nutrients and sediment from surface runoff which enter our surface waters. Encroachment into our streamside forest buffers has reduced the extent of streambank protection resulting in an adverse effect on water quality.

Since 1935, NRCS’s nationwide conservation delivery system works with private landowners to put conservation on the ground based on specific, local conservation needs, while accommodating state and national interests.