

Vermont, AGO & CSAs: Overview

Through the America's Great Outdoors Initiative (AGO), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering financial and technical assistance to farmers located in the Missisquoi Bay Basin. America's Great Outdoors was established in April 2010 based on the President's belief that for America to be at its strongest, we need a healthy and accessible environment. One of AGO's major goals is to conserve rural working farms and forests through partnerships and incentives. Through land conservation and improvement of water quality, Americans will be more connected to their environment.

The Missisquoi Bay Basin has been selected as a prioritized watershed based on the availability of a complex computer modeling project that has identified Critical Source Areas (CSAs) of phosphorus to Missisquoi Bay. Areas shown in this model as potential CSAs were classified primarily by their soils, landscape features, proximity and connectivity to streams, and the land use practices that are in place.

Since this information is based on a model, there is a potential for error in the identification of CSAs. The CSA information is very useful for knowing what properties have a high likelihood of excess phosphorus in the soil, and an apparently easy route for phosphorus to reach a tributary stream. This report helps to detect Critical Areas so producers know where and how to use best management practices (BMPs) to protect water quality.

At NRCS, this study helps to guide federal funding to the areas that will bring the biggest results for the investment. NRCS will help producers implement conservation land management practices through a systems approach to control and trap nutrient and manure runoff. Qualified produc-



Vermont partners in conservation strategize on how to use funds provided by the AGO initiative to create the biggest positive impact on water quality in VT.

ers will receive assistance for installing conservation practices such as cover crops, filter strips and grassed waterways.

The Missisquoi Bay Basin

The Missisquoi Bay Basin is a 460,000 acre drainage area in northern Franklin and Orleans counties of Vermont. It is dominated by forestland, agricultural land, and small rural towns. The entire Basin drains to Missisquoi Bay, which has significant water quality concerns associated with nutrient loading and blue-green algae blooms.

Conservation Funding and Practices

NRCS conservation professionals and their partners will provide technical assistance to determine which conservation actions on identified CSA's will provide the best results to improve water quality. Conservation tillage, cover crops, and filter strips are just some of the practices being offered as part of the project. To help install these conservation practices, financial as-

istance to share in the cost of these conservation practices is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS and their partners are discussing options to provide up to 90 or 100% of the anticipated practice cost, as was done in 2012. However, nothing has been finalized and NRCS is unable to assure that increased cost share will be available in 2013.

Partnerships

The Critical Source Area Study, coordinated by the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP), identified areas within the landscape that contribute higher amounts of Phosphorus to waterways in the Missisquoi Bay Basin. As a result, federal and state agencies and local partners can now target their limited conservation funding to specific areas in the Basin. NRCS is working with a variety of partners, including the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAF), the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD), UVM Extension, Friends of Northern Lake Champlain, and others to contact farmers directly who have CSA mapped areas on their farm.

Technical assistance will be provided in the form of recommended practices for site specific situations. Financial assistance is being provided at a higher than normal cost share rate to support practice implementation. Funds are being provided by NRCS, VAAFM, the LCBP and UVM Extension.

Producer Benefits

Water quality conservation practices benefit agricultural producers by **lowering input costs** and **enhancing the productivity of working lands**. Many of these conservation practices also **promote soil quality** and **enhance the availability of nutrients**. 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.

Public Benefits

NRCS is proud to be involved in an effort with partners and farmers to improve and protect our water resources. The 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 the St. Albans or Newport USDA Service Center. You will need to establish eligibility and farm records for your land. NRCS will help you complete an application and a conservation plan for your farm. **All applications for funding consideration, during fiscal year 2013, must be received by February 15, 2013.** If funds are still available after the February 15 deadline, there will be a second application deadline of April 1, 2013.



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Practices Offered

*Practices offered through the
AGO CSA Initiative:*

- Conservation Crop Rotation
- Cover Crop
- Critical Area Planning
- Diversion
- Filter Strip
- Forage and Biomass Planting
- Grassed Waterway
- Grade Stabilization Structure
- Lined Waterway or Outlet
- Mulching
- Reduced Tillage-Mulch Till
- Reduced Tillage-No Till
- Riparian Forest Buffer
- Strip Cropping
- Underground Outlet
- Waste Recycling (Manure Injection or Aeration)

Funding Available

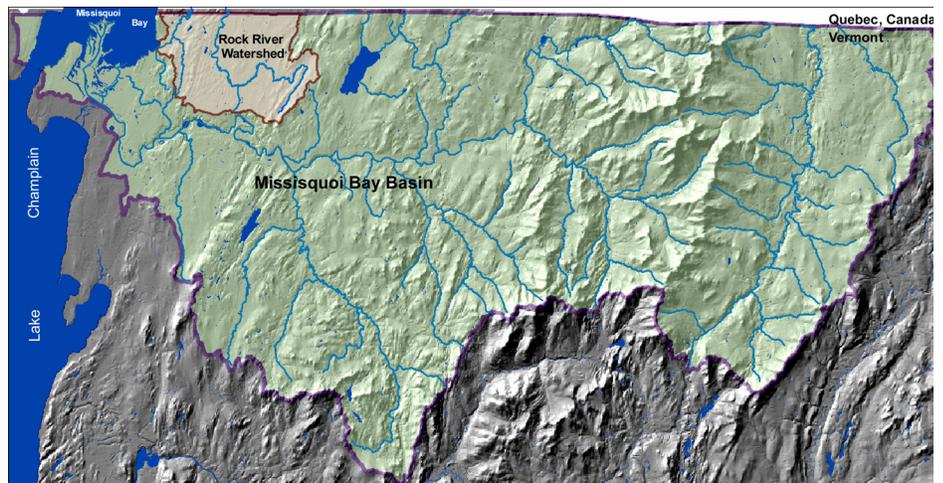
Vermont NRCS was granted \$546,647 for the AGO initiative in 2013.

For more Information and an Application

USDA - NRCS, Vermont State Office
356 Mountain View Drive, Suite 105
Colchester, Vermont 05446
802-951-6796
www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov

USDA - NRCS, St. Albans Office
27 Fisher Pond Road, Suite 1
St. Albans, VT 05478
802-524-6505

USDA - NRCS, Newport Office
59 Waterfront Plaza, Suite 11
Newport, VT 05855
802-334-6090



The Missisquoi Bay Basin is a 460,000 acre drainage area in northern Franklin and Orleans counties of Vermont.

Map provided by: Reed Sims, NRCS

The AGO / CSA Initiative is made possible by NRCS and our Partners



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