

Mississippi North Central Watershed Stakeholder Information

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What is a watershed?

A watershed is an area of land that drains to a body of water, such as a lake, stream, or river. Watersheds can be as small as the drainage area for a pond or as large as the Mississippi River Basin. The Mississippi North Central (Flint-Henderson) watershed is a sub watershed within the larger Mississippi River Basin. It covers approximately 1.1 million acres and encompasses portions of six counties in Illinois. The Mississippi North Central Watershed is comprised of over 65 tributaries including Henderson Creek, Edwards River, and Cedar Creek.

Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS)

In 2008, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tasked the twelve highest nutrient contributing states to produce a nutrient loss strategy. Each state was responsible for creating its own strategy that outlined how the state was going to reduce the nutrient loads leaving the state by 45%. Prior to publishing the 2015 NLRS, the Illinois EPA identified nutrient priority watersheds. Watersheds can vary in size and are rarely contained within one county. The Mississippi North Central Watershed was identified as a nitrogen priority watershed by the NLRS. Part of what makes the Illinois NLRS so unique is the broad scope of partners that help lead and support the goals outlined in the strategy. One way to reduce nutrient loss is through the use of various conservation practices, several are outlined within the NLRS, that can be used to reduce nitrate and/or phosphorus entering our waterbodies and making its way to the Mississippi River.

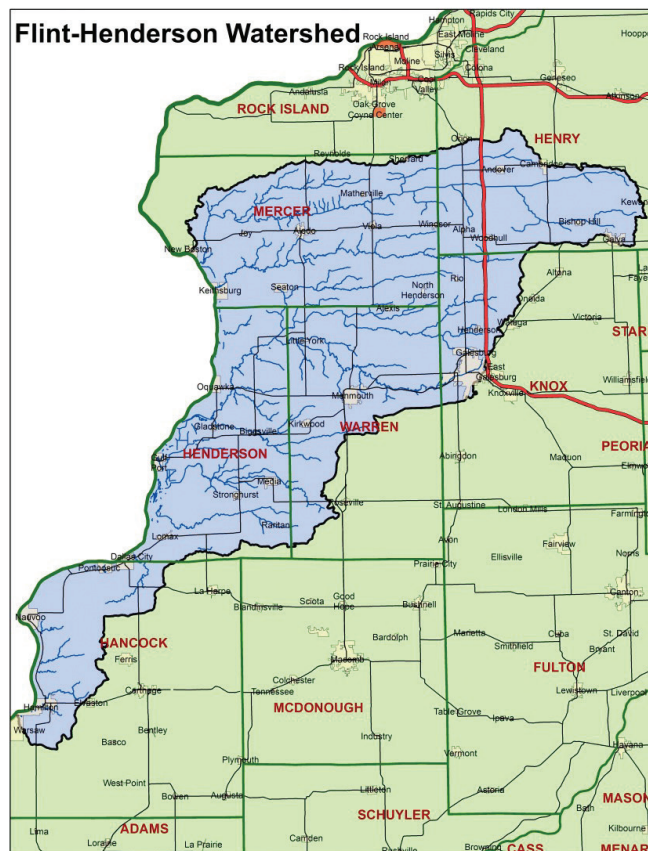


FIGURE 1 Map of the Mississippi North Central (Flint-Henderson) Watershed.
Source: Illinois Extension

Watershed planning

Watershed plans are valuable tools that summarize the condition of the watershed as well as provide framework to effectively and efficiently restore and protect water quality. Watershed planning and implementation of agriculture conservation practices are completely voluntary efforts.

Once a watershed plan is completed, it can be used to apply for grants and/or cost-share opportunities to help offset the overall costs of implementing conservation practices identified in the plan. One possible source of funding for watershed planning and implementation is through 319 grant funding.

What is a 319 Grant?

Outlined in Section 319 of the Clean Water Act, federal funds are allocated to states, tribes, and U.S. territories to provide financial assistance to help control nonpoint source pollution. This type of grant provides up to 60% cost-share, requiring a minimum match of 40%. Nonpoint source pollution is pollution that comes from runoff and erosion of urban and agricultural lands and not from a single source like point source pollution. In Illinois, 319 grants are awarded through the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to fund projects addressing water quality issues relating directly to nonpoint source pollution. Each year, Illinois EPA allocates approximately \$3.5 million and funds approximately 15 projects. These funds can be used to develop, update, and implement a watershed plan. Once a watershed plan is in place, 319 funds can be used for the installation of best management practices recommended in the watershed plan.

County	Acres	Percent
Henry	168,209	10
Mercer	297,697	26.6
Knox	82,285	7.3
Warren	200,324	17.9
Henderson	243,040	21.7
Hancock	128,247	11.5
Total	1,119,784	100

TABLE 1 Distribution of Mississippi North Central watershed areas by county.
Source: USDA-NRCS

Efforts To Date

County watershed meetings were held in August 2021 throughout the Mississippi North Central Watershed to gauge stakeholder interest and to begin identifying key locations for conservation practice implementation. Follow up meetings were held in Mercer and Knox counties in February 2022 to reassess stakeholder interest and focus on the next steps which include determining the sub-watersheds that will be used for watershed plans. The meetings were also valuable to hear more from landowners and farmers to determine interest in conservation practices as well as potential locations.

What's next?

The initial 319 grant that is being used to support the development of a future watershed plan for the Mississippi North Central Watershed was awarded May 2022. Now that the grant has been awarded, Northwater Consulting will begin creating the watershed characterization for the Mississippi North Central Watershed. While the initial watershed characterization is a little more broad in scope, the eventual goal is to create a targeted watershed plan at a sub-watershed scale that will include farmers' and landowners' interests.

Partners



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Questions?

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OR

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