

Mississippi River Watershed Partnership



Roadmap #4: Conduct a gap analysis to identify where increased investment is needed, using an inventory of actions (e.g., funding, BMP implementation, load reductions) from projects implemented through NRCS programs, Clean Water Act-authorized initiatives, and other relevant programs.

The Mississippi River Watershed is one of North America's most important ecological, economic, and cultural resources. To promote collective progress and align efforts across this vast and diverse system, America's Watershed Initiative and The Nature Conservancy led a collaborative process to develop a set of shared priority goals and actions for the Watershed¹. These goals reflect the vision and expertise of a broad range of partners and are designed to support integrated, long-term outcomes across key issue areas: conserve fish and wildlife, mitigate floods and droughts, sustain inland navigation, enhance recreation, and improve water quality. They articulate the long-term outcomes the Mississippi River Watershed Partnership (MRWP) aims to achieve together. The accompanying actions are near-term strategies that can help generate measurable progress toward those outcomes. This framework provides a foundation for coordination, guides investment, and helps partners align their efforts in service of a more resilient, healthy, and sustainable Mississippi River Watershed.

This roadmap document presents current work and a pathway forward towards achieving one of the actions identified in the aforementioned collaborative process. The action "Conduct a gap analysis to identify where increased investment is needed, using an inventory of actions (e.g., funding, BMP implementation, load reductions) from projects implemented through NRCS programs, Clean Water Act-authorized initiatives, and other relevant programs." was identified as a priority for current or near-term future work for 30 out of 34 professionals surveyed (~88%). Draft roadmaps were first created at the MRWP 2025 Workshop², and were then iterated by MRWP convening partners, roadmap authors, and other relevant stakeholders.

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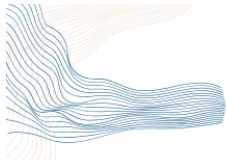
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¹ For the full list of priority goals and actions by key issue area, please see [this link](#).

² For the full workshop report, please see this [link](#).



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Background

Key Issue: Water Quality

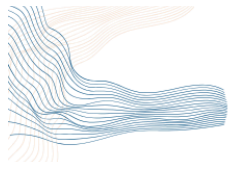
Priority Goals

- Measurably reduce nitrate and phosphorus entering waterways, in line with the Gulf Hypoxia Task Force goals.
- Ensure sediment loads approximate regional needs.
- Identify and reduce key emerging and legacy pollutants.
- Implement watershed-wide management plans based on a better understanding of water quality issues and impacts.

Action: Conduct a gap analysis to identify where increased investment is needed, using an inventory of actions (e.g., funding, BMP implementation, load reductions) from projects implemented through NRCS programs, Clean Water Act-authorized initiatives, and other relevant programs.

How does this action support priority goals?

- An inventory of water quality actions that is geospatially referenced can allow funding to be used in high impact locations that could result in greater nitrate and phosphorus reduction.
- This inventory of geospatially referenced water quality actions can support understanding of current regional sediment loads through data available at those locations on sediment load.
- An inventory of water quality actions that is geospatially referenced can allow funding to be used in high impact locations that could result in greater pollution reduction.
- With an inventory of water quality actions at watershed scale, management plans that address the whole basin will be better informed.



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Who is already working towards this action?

Collectively, participants at the August workshop and members of the focus area work group identified more than 15 organizations working toward this action. There are groups working at state, sub-basin, and federal scales to collect information about projects that have been implemented, including the programs that organize and fund these projects. Some states are looking at higher resolution information with specific water quality strategies, such as Minnesota's Nutrient Reduction Strategy, and Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy. These strategies have dashboards that help track implementation and provide funds for education opportunities and partnerships for research. There are also groups working on this that follow watershed boundaries: the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission, and the [Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program](#).

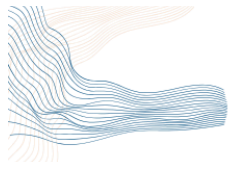
Additional details on organizations and actions related to this roadmap are currently being gathered by the Mississippi River Watershed Partnership. The associated document will be linked here and available soon.

Challenges

Across the organizations in the MWRP who participated in the production of this action plan, there was agreement that the current challenges in fulfilling these actions lie in the following:

- There is a lack of resources, especially as both federal and state funding for water quality improvement work has been cut in recent years.
- Comprehensive and standardized data for monitoring is lacking, especially at the scale of the Mississippi River Watershed.
- There is a lack of capacity, so ensuring that efforts are not duplicated is top of mind.

The MWRP aims to support this action via strategies that amplify the work that organizations are doing and connect these organizations towards bigger impact.



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Priority Path and Action Plan

In order to “Conduct a gap analysis to identify where increased investment is needed, using an inventory of actions (e.g., funding, BMP implementation, load reductions) from projects implemented through NRCS programs, Clean Water Act-authorized initiatives, and other relevant programs,” the Mississippi River Watershed Partnership will focus on **creating an inventory of actions and then analyzing it for gaps.**

The first step will be to set criteria for what counts as a water quality action. Then, a detailed gap analysis will need to be done to understand what is already happening and where new investment could make the greatest impact. A solid analysis of that inventory will be crucial to begin implementing new projects that are informed by what already exists.

Additional details on priority tasks and associated deliverables, implementors, and timelines are currently being developed by the Mississippi River Watershed Partnership. The associated working document can be found [here](#).

Alternative Paths Forward

Roadmap authors also identified alternative paths forward that were not chosen due to feasibility. These included:

- Replicate ORSANCO report in the whole basin with UMR as the pilot, tying it in to existing monitoring networks, and produce periodic reports
- Support federal programs by interviewing watershed coordinators specifically and seeing what their needs are.
- Set transparent, agreed-upon performance standards for nutrient reduction.
- Figuring out how to connect decision-makers and the public towards aligned action on this topic.
- Mississippi River Dashboard - moved away from this because it would take too much work and resources.
- Tracking all the projects around nutrient reduction that are being cancelled.
- Policy advocacy to assure funding for these programs.

Notes

- Participants mentioned the Great Lakes to Gulf Monitoring Program and looking into permit violations as other ways to pinpoint water quality issues in the watershed.

Methods

This action plan was created via workshops, working meetings, and desktop research by participants of the Mississippi River Watershed Partnership, convened by America’s Watershed Initiative and The Nature Conservancy. For more information, please see the partnership website: <https://americaswatershed.org/partnership/>