

The Yellow River Initiative

Reason for this Initiative:

- The *Midwest Natural Resources Group (MNRG)* does not have a rapid, clearly defined, cost-effective method for identifying opportunities to promote natural resource sustainability and effective stewardship of natural resources within small watersheds.

What's the "MNRG?":

- The *MNRG* is an ongoing Federal interagency *partnership that focuses activities to support the health, vitality, and sustainability of natural resources and the environment.*
- It is the overarching goal of the *MNRG* to develop processes, marshal resources among agencies and partners, seek opportunities for collaboration and communication, and provide timely assistance where it is needed.
- Working together, the agencies represented by the *MNRG* are committed to bringing results to the American people in the rural communities, towns, and farms of the Midwest.

The "Rapid Resource Sustainability Assessment:"An Approach for "On-the-Ground" Action:

- In order to address shortcoming, the *MNRG*, in partnership with other levels of government and non-governmental organizations, as well as local landowners and citizens, as appropriate, will develop a pilot "*Rapid Resource Sustainability Assessment (RRSA)*" for the Yellow River watershed in northeastern Iowa.
- **Watershed** = The fundamental planning unit, from an ecological perspective, demarcated by its hydrogeographic boundaries. *Small* watersheds are defined here as those *ideally* containing 50,000 to 100,000 acres for the purpose of practical evaluation.
- **Sustainability** = The stewardship of an area's natural resources that are actively conserved, rehabilitated, and maintained along with its associated natural patterns, ecological processes and functions. This would be accomplished *in relation to and in balance with* the area's cultural resources and on-going human developmental needs for the purposes of ensuring the long term health and vitality of those resources and natural systems and to preserve as many options of use as possible for the future.
- This pilot project should be completed within one to two years.
- The *RRSA* would be developed primarily with "off-the-shelf" information, to the extent practicable, and would be conducted via a *temporary* interagency, interdisciplinary task force, together with the *MNRG*'s "Upper Mississippi River Focus Area Team" and local partners.
- The *RRSA* is **not** a study to define how to do a study **nor** will it result in a "cookie-cutter" product that can be indiscriminately applied to all other watersheds. **It is**, instead, a *rapid, dynamic, and flexible analytical process* that could be adapted to different watershed situations.

Location for Development of the "Rapid Resource Sustainability Assessment":

- The Yellow River watershed is located in northeastern Iowa's unglaciated "Driftless Area."
- This 154,666-acre watershed has diverse topographic and natural resource features, along with a variety of resource-related problems, which are similar to those found throughout the watersheds of most tributary streams feeding into the Upper Mississippi River.
- Several federal agency members of the *MNRG* have a presence or programmatic involvement within the Yellow River watershed.

Objectives for the Initiative:

The purpose of the “Yellow River Initiative” is fourfold:

- To assess the natural resources within the Yellow River watershed, based on existing information, and determine their extent, distribution, and condition;
- To allow a team of federal and local, non-federal partners to summarize the assessment results and use them to identify possible options to promote the long-term sustainability of the watershed’s natural resources;
- To develop a “toolbox” of technical assistance information and contacts to help the public to implement these various identified options; and
- To empower people to *voluntarily* use this information to help them achieve long-term natural resource sustainability and stewardship within the Yellow River watershed.

Anticipated Results from this Initiative:

By accomplishing these objectives, it is hoped that the *RRSA* will provide a consistent approach for rapid evaluation of resource conditions at the small watershed scale in order to promote sustainable natural function and ecological integrity.

The *RRSA* process should benefit local residents by providing them with appropriate, *understandable* information on natural resources and related technical assistance so that they might feel empowered to be more effective stewards of the area.

After completion of the *RRSA*, *voluntary* relationships among local residents, landowners, and federal, state and local governments, as well as with non-governmental organizations, could be established to promote the stewardship of the watershed’s natural resources for long-term sustainability in balance with the needs of the area’s ongoing human development.

Through the development of its “toolbox” of technical and programmatic assistance information, the completed *RRSA* would help residents define *how* they could, *if desired*, request *technical and/or financial assistance* from government and non-governmental sources to promote the development of creative and innovative solutions for locally identified resource problems.

For information on how you can become an active partner in the “***Yellow River Initiative***,” or for additional information on various aspects of the ***Initiative*** or its ongoing progress, please contact:

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