

Natural Resources Conservation Service
State Technical Committee
10:00am Thursday, May 09, 2019
Laman Library, North Little Rock, AR

Agenda packets were distributed

Meeting called to order by Mike Sullivan, AR NRCS State Conservationist

Members present: See attached sign in sheets

Welcome & Opening Remarks Mike Sullivan, State Conservationist

Mike outlined briefly the new farm bill, which maintains all current NRCS programs and provides a funding stream for PL-566. The new farm bill calls for collaboration with State Technical Committee for several things, including Source Water Protection.

Source Water Protection will ask State Conservationist to collaborate with State Technical Committee to identify local areas for protection of source water- either ground or surface. NRCS has met with Arkansas Department of Health to learn more about protection areas already identified. NRCS will use the local led process to gather more input. Eventual goal of 10% of total financial assistance funds going toward practices in source water protection areas.

Mike mentioned that due to the new farm bill and current rule making processes that input from the state technical committee may be needed in between meetings, NRCS will use email to the extent practical to keep everyone informed and offer opportunities for comment.

Subcommittee Reports

- **Grassland – Jeremy Huff, NRCS Grazing Specialist**

- o 27 Trainings in FY18 were held statewide which were field days
- o Arkansas was 4th in the nation for fencing applied and pasture improvement, 8th in the nation for water tanks.
- o Partners have been helpful in developing a variety of programs
- o **Recommendations**
 1. Continue working to get a waiver to allow applying herbicide more than once for 314 and 315
 2. CSP for pasture needs adjustment related to the quality of enhancements –
 - NRCS sent 10 enhancements to HQ but they have not been approved yet
 3. Payment CSP rates need to be increased
 4. Initiate progress for an AR Lime Standard– quality standard for lime needs to be established through legislation

- **Water Quality – Roger Cousins, NRCS Water Specialist**

- o Shared results from Buffalo Slough-Cache River Implementation Phase NWQI
- o Shared results from Greasy Creek-Strawberry River HUC12 Watershed – newer implementation watershed
- o NWQI and MRBI Readiness Phase

- Departee Creek NWQI – Independence, White and Jackson Counties (5 HUC 12 digits)
- o **Recommendations:**
 1. Recommended Strawberry River for NWQI for 2020
 2. Lave Creek and Caney Creek for NWQI for 2020
 3. Cross County MRBI project for FY 2020 (Headwater First Creek, Lower Brushy Creek, Middle Second Creek, and Outlet First Creek.
 4. Hold subcommittee meetings in conjunction with other groups to get more farmer/producer input.
 5. Include Safe Harbor/Conservation Agreement with Assurance in the water quality and wildlife ranking questions at the state level for FY2020.
- **Water Quantity – Charolette Bowie, State Irrigation Engineer**
 1. All recommendations from last year have been adopted/implemented.
 2. **Recommendations**
 - Programs
 1. Request to continue current IWM Specialist positions and to increase that number where possible.
 2. Request to continue the efforts to increase the options for irrigated enhancements
 - Improve implementation of water saving practices/technique by
 1. Continue getting the specialist to speak at meetings
 2. Publicize more of the work and benefits they are seeing through grower highlights either in Delta Farm Press, County Newsletters, NRCS Newsletters or other.
 - Concerning IWM surface plan options
 1. Request to take this discussion and for FY20 (Oct 2019) update the basic options to a more realistic and farmer friendly basic option
 2. Request for review of policies and procedures to determine options for producers on moving through the system levels.
- **Energy – Shanon Griffin, Energy Specialist**
 - o Recommendations
 1. Add LED Dimmer light control (currently funded in OK under 670)
 2. Add 36” Exhaust fans- must meet 17.2 CFM per watt or better
 3. Arkansas should adopt the payment rates for 900 Series TA Funding
- **Wildlife – Ryan Diener, Quail Forever State Coordinator**
 - o EQIP Update
 - o 27 contracts FY19
 - o 10 Contracts FY18
 - o \$471,582 total obligated
 - o **Recommendations**
 1. Review Code 645 Upland Wildlife Habitat Management for possible changes
 2. Add grazing practices to Working Lands for Wildlife that coincide with native grasses
 3. Safe Harbor/Candidate Conservation Program
 - Include this program in the state ranking questions in most, if not all funding pools

4. Accept both job sheets (provided in packet) subject to the Downed Tree Structure scenario being re-worded to address concern related to size of structure
 5. Potential Initiatives/Activities
 - Providing winter water and reduced tillage during the winter for water fowl
 - Voluntary public access for recreation; hunting, fishing and bird watching
 - Joint training on grazing management; native grazing specialists provide training to conservation partners. National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative – Pat Kryser will provide this training at no costs
 - Discuss with Jeremy Huff, AR NRCS Grazing Specialist
 - Future training might include producers
- **Forestry – Josh Smith, South Area Forester**
 - FY19 Joint Chief Project (WAWRP)
 - o Funded for FY19-FY21
 - o \$1.5 million per year
 - o Designed to spatially connect diverse acres of restored woodlands across jurisdictional boundaries
 - o Focus on enhancing shortleaf pine ecosystem
 - o Removal/control of invasive species
 - o Fencing
 - o Tree Planting
 - **Recommendations**
 1. Revise sentence for specification for Forest Stand Improvement to say pre-commercial thinning is justified if the stand contains 700 or more seedlings per acre.
 2. Revise stock rates to state final planting densities for these will vary from 436 to 681 pine seedlings per acres and 302 to 436 hardwood seedlings per acre
 - **Soil Health and Alternative Crops – Troyce Barnett**
 - The committee identified areas where additional research/information is needed
 - o Number of acres of cover crops, are we capturing all acres being planted?
 - o What is the correlation between cover crops and water quality?
 - o Slugs are a concern related to cover crops- need more research
 - o Edge of field monitoring and MRBI provides good information but may not tell where the loads in the stream come from.
 - **Recommendations- Soil Health**
 - o Look at a program similar to CRP for cover crops.
 - o Look at caps on cover crops – can they be raised?
 - o Look at educational program to address pest infestation, such as slugs
 - o Look at possible research on the correlation between cover crops and water quality benefits
 - **Recommendations- Alternative Crops**
 - o Remove irrigation history from high tunnel in order to qualify for micro-irrigation

- o Look at offering the rain gutters on the high tunnel hoop houses
 - o More focus on IWM for specialty/alternative crops
- **Feral Swine Program – James Baker, NRCS and Mike Hoy, APHIS-WS**
 - o Pilot Feral Swine Project for eradication and control of population
 - o NRCS and APHIS will coordinate efforts
 - \$75 million – 50% to NRCS and 50% APHIS
 - 50% NRCS – For landowner payments & technical assistance and will be implemented through partner project agreements
 - Model is to remove the entire sounder
 - o APHIS will provide the technical assistance, remote activated traps
 - o Congress will be looking for results
 - o Pilot counties were selected via criteria based on local interest, try to control pig populations to diminish agricultural damage
 - o Map was provided to the group for review and discussion
 - o This is a two-phase process
 - o NRCS/APHIS decide on the pilot project areas
 - o Template will be provided to allow proposals to be submitted
 - o 11 states have been identified to participate but no guarantee of funding
 - o Proposals should include working through conservation districts
 - o APF should be out in June. NRCS has been tasked with defining geographic areas in the state to focus this effort prior to submission of proposals and is seeking this input from partners and stakeholders by May 19, 2019.

CART – Jena Moore, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

Jena went over the new Conservation Assessment Rating Tool. This tool will provide a more streamlined conservation planning and application ranking process. This tool will still allow integration of State Technical Committee and local led input. The tool is still in the development stage but will be deployed for use next fiscal year.

Ground Water Decline Initiative– Walt Delp, State Conservation Engineer

Walt provided an overview of the initiative- including the tiered approach based on the most severe cones of depression. NRCS is requesting targeted EQIP dollars for this project, \$10 million a year for ten years.

PROGRAMS:

EQIP, Cory Farmer, Resource Conservationist

Corey went over the numbers showing the percent funded and showing the rate of obligation for the current year.

RCPP/MRBI, Dianne Schlenker, Initiatives Coordinator

NRCS does not have new RCPP guidelines yet. They are expected in June. A call for RCPP proposals has not yet been issued.

MRBI- NRCS is working on completing watershed assessments for 5 project areas for FY19. After completing NRCS may request financial assistance funds for FY20 within those project areas. They anticipate another call for watersheds to enter the readiness phase (complete a watershed assessment) later this year.

ACEP – Randy Childress, Assistant State Conservationist for Easements.

Randy stated that AR NRCS is number two in the nation for easements enrolled. This includes WRP, HFRP, GRP, EWP-FPE, and WRE easements. Arkansas received a near \$20M allocation but with such high demand that will not address all needs so they have requested additional funds.

A WREP announcement is anticipated shortly.

Conservation Stewardship Program – Becky Long

- Voluntary program that provides landowners financial incentives for already implementing conservation practices through enhancements of those practices
- 2014 Farm Bill
 - o 3,325 contracts - \$226,453,000 obligated
 - o Payments - \$197,628,000+
 - o Contract acres – 3,154,555 acres
- 2018 Farm Bill
 - o Existing contracts will continue under previous authority
 - o No renewals authorized under new authority
 - o State will receive funding allocations for 5 years
 - o \$18/acre national average removed
 - o Both general and renewal application will be ranked and compete for available funds
 - o Higher payments rates for cover crops
 - o CSP-Grassland Conservation Initiative
 - Eligible land includes cropland for which base acres have been maintained
 - 5-year contract
 - o RCPP – CSP – obligation deadline by Sept 13, 2019
 - o CSP Tools FY 2019
 - Activity list for planners
 - Activity list for participants
 - Enhancements compatibility matrix
 - Applicable Activities by Resource Concern Cause
 - Enhancement job sheets and State Supplements
 - Bundle job sheets
 - 2019 CSP Arkansas Cost list
 - Conservation Activity Evaluation Tool (CAET)

Outreach/Strikeforce – Alvin Peer, NRCS

Alvin offered his assistance to the participants as they work with their constituents. NRCS has \$4 million in Strikeforce dollars in FY2019.

NRCS Funding Opportunity – Dianne Schlenker

Dianne gave an overview of the funding opportunity announced through grants.gov for technical projects, APF proposals are due May 24, 2019

Closing Comments: Mike Sullivan

Mike asked for feedback on the possibility of holding 3 meetings of the committee every year instead of just two. The third meeting would be to hear from the members of the STC.

Meeting adjourned at 2:00pm



Downed Tree Structure

Arkansas Job Sheet

JS-AR649 Downed Tree Structure

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
May 2019

Arkansas Conservation Practice 649

Landowner/Producer:		Farm #:
Field/Stand(s):	Acres:	Tract #:
Planned By:		County:
Contact Information:		Date:

PURPOSE:

Shrubby/woody escape cover is often the missing habitat component for bobwhite quail in fields managed for early successional wildlife. Downed tree structures (DTS) provide an immediate temporary source of woody cover in areas where shrubby cover is lacking. In the winter, quail rarely travel farther than 70 feet from shrubby cover. The location and quantity of shrubby cover can determine how much of an area will be available for use. By the addition and distribution of DTS throughout large grassland fields, the amount of available habitat for quail will increase. To be effective, place DTS within or adjacent to early-successional vegetation such as managed wildlife friendly grasses/legumes/forbs, field borders, food plots, or cropland.



SPECIFICATIONS: Create 0.1 acre to 1.0 acre of dense woody cover per 5-40 acres of wildlife friendly habitat. The size of a downed tree structure shall be 30'X50'. It takes three downed tree structures of this size to equal 0.1 acre. Downed tree structures must be placed at least 70 feet from a forest edge or woody draw and placed next to early successional vegetation. When complete, the interlaced branches will cover at least 1500 square feet. Do not push downed trees into dense brush piles. These structures are intended to be "open" to allow space for the movement of quail and other upland wildlife within the structure. Simply drag the downed trees to the desired location and place in a loose arrangement. Oak, hickory, cedar, and Osage orange make good downed tree structures. Pine, elm, sweetgum, cottonwood, and willow do not make good downed tree structures.



☐ Establish _____ 30'x50' Downed Tree Structures

☐ Choose a minimum of 6 well-branched, durable trees that are at least 30 feet in height (do not count the unbranched trunk) and have a trunk approximately 10 inches wide at breast height. The material needs to cover the 30'x50' space.

☐ Place DTS in a loose arrangement at least 70 feet from a woody draw, fenceline, or forest edge.

☐ Kill all existing grass, regardless of type with an approved herbicide in the area the DTS will be placed.

☐ Supplement DTS with new felled trees when the existing downed material begins to deteriorate. (Unless Native shrub species have filled in the area already)

☐ Exclude livestock from DTS.



MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Use herbicides to suppress invasive vegetation and to control noxious weeds.
- Over time downed trees will eventually deteriorate. Enhance each structure by periodically adding more downed trees.
- Protect downed tree structures from prescribed burning by disking firebreaks around each structure prior to the prescribed burn.

Comment:

Upon completion of the practice, I certify that the above listed practice was completed according to the NRCS specifications, design, and installation on the field and area identified above.

NRCS or TSP SIGNATURE

DATE



Edge Feathering

Arkansas Job Sheet

JS-AR649 Edge Feathering

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
May 2019

Arkansas Conservation Practice 649

Landowner/Producer:		Farm #:
Field/Stand(s):	Acres:	Tract #:
Planned By:		County:
Contact Information:		Date:

PURPOSE:

Many wildlife species need dense shrubby/woody escape cover on a daily basis and this habitat component many wildlife species will be absent. Most field edges, woody draws, and fencelines have abrupt changes from grass or crops to mature trees. Edge feathering is used to create woody escape cover along these field margins. This creates a transition zone of shrubs, vines, and herbaceous vegetation between cropland or grassland and the wooded edge. To be effective, edge feathering should be completed next to early successional vegetation, such as managed wildlife friendly grasses/legumes, field borders, food plots, or cropland.



BEFORE - NO COVER AT GROUND LEVEL



AFTER - INSTANT ESCAPE COVER

SPECIFICATIONS:

Edge feathering may be completed in blocks or in long linear strips along the field edge. Pick an area to edge feather where all existing trees can be cut, avoiding valuable timber or mast producing trees. If possible, leave felled trees where they fall. Edge feathered trees may be dropped parallel to the fence line/field edge or cut and loosely stacked along the edge of the field. Do not push the downed trees into a dense brush pile. Edge feathering may be completed with a chainsaw or mechanical clipper. The use of bulldozers is an unacceptable method.



- ☐ Create 0.1 to 1.0 acre of dense woody cover per 5-40 acres of wildlife friendly habitat. The minimum size of each resulting brushy/shrubby area is 30'X50'. It takes three 30'X50' areas to equal 0.1 acre.
- ☐ Complete a total of _____ acres of edge feathering or _____ 30'x50' plots.
- ☐ **Treat all existing grass**, especially sod-forming grasses such as tall fescue and bermuda, with an approved contact herbicide in the area the trees will fall. This will create bare ground and provide good growing conditions for annual food plants and shrubs.
- ☐ Cut all trees over 12 feet tall in the area to be edge feathered. Cut all stems over 1" in diameter.
- ☐ Treat all cut stumps (except cedar) with an approved herbicide to prolong the benefits of edge feathering. Leave native shrubs like dogwood and plum if they are less than 12 feet tall. If they are greater than 12 feet tall, cut them off at ground level and DO NOT treat the shrub stumps. Cutting down older stems will encourage new shoot growth.
- ☐ Exclude livestock from edge feathered areas.

MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Use herbicides to suppress invasive vegetation and to control noxious weeds.
- Edge feathering can be expected to provide quality dense woody cover for 5-10 years. The area should be re-treated when at least 50 percent of the re-growth exceeds 12 feet tall.
- Re-treat all invading grasses every 3 years with an approved herbicide.

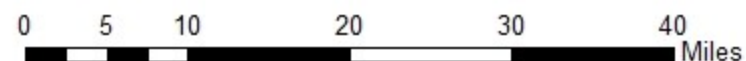
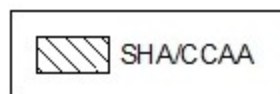
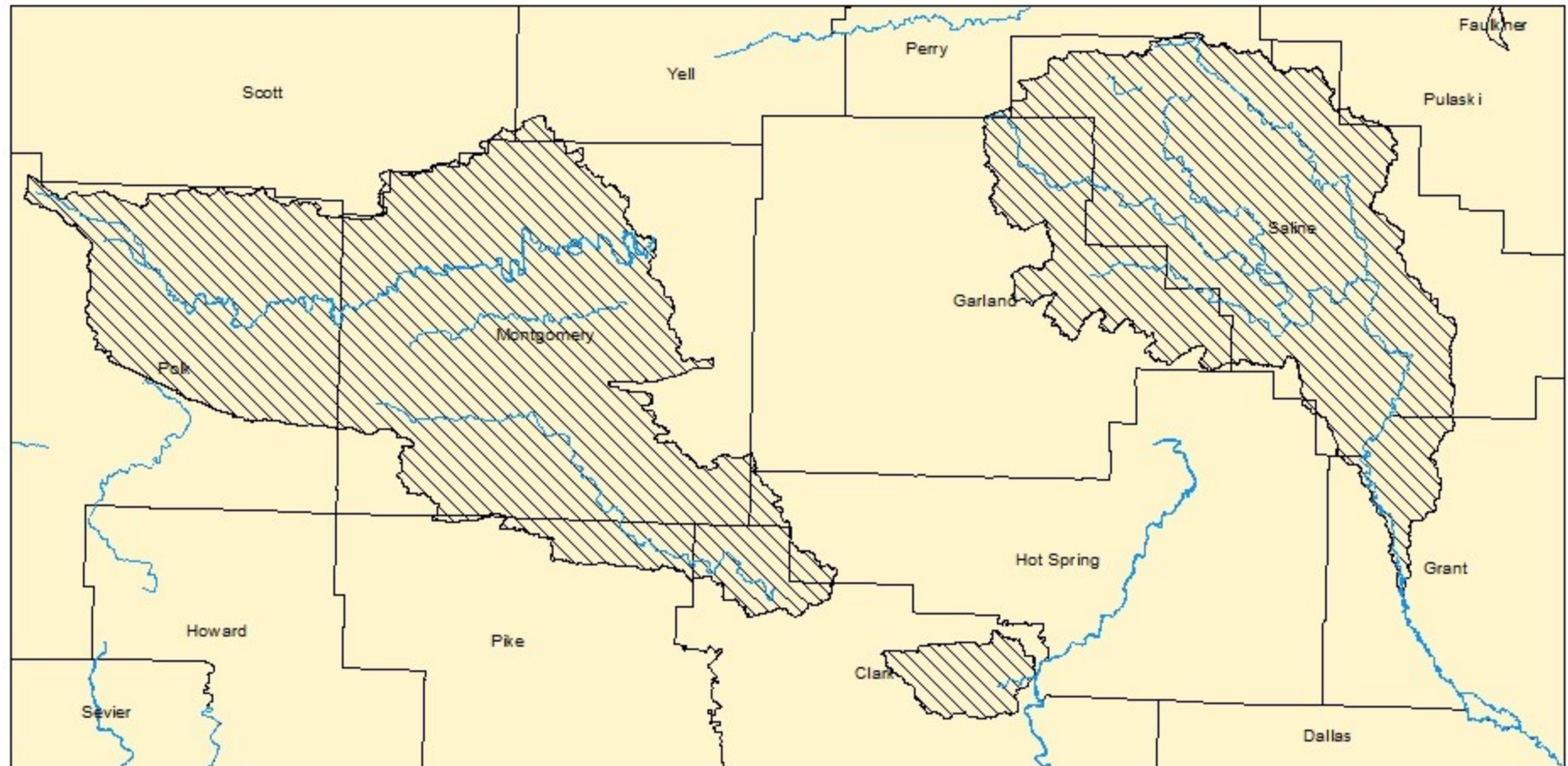
Comment:

Upon completion of the practice, I certify that the above listed practice was completed according to the NRCS specifications, design, and installation on the field and area identified above.

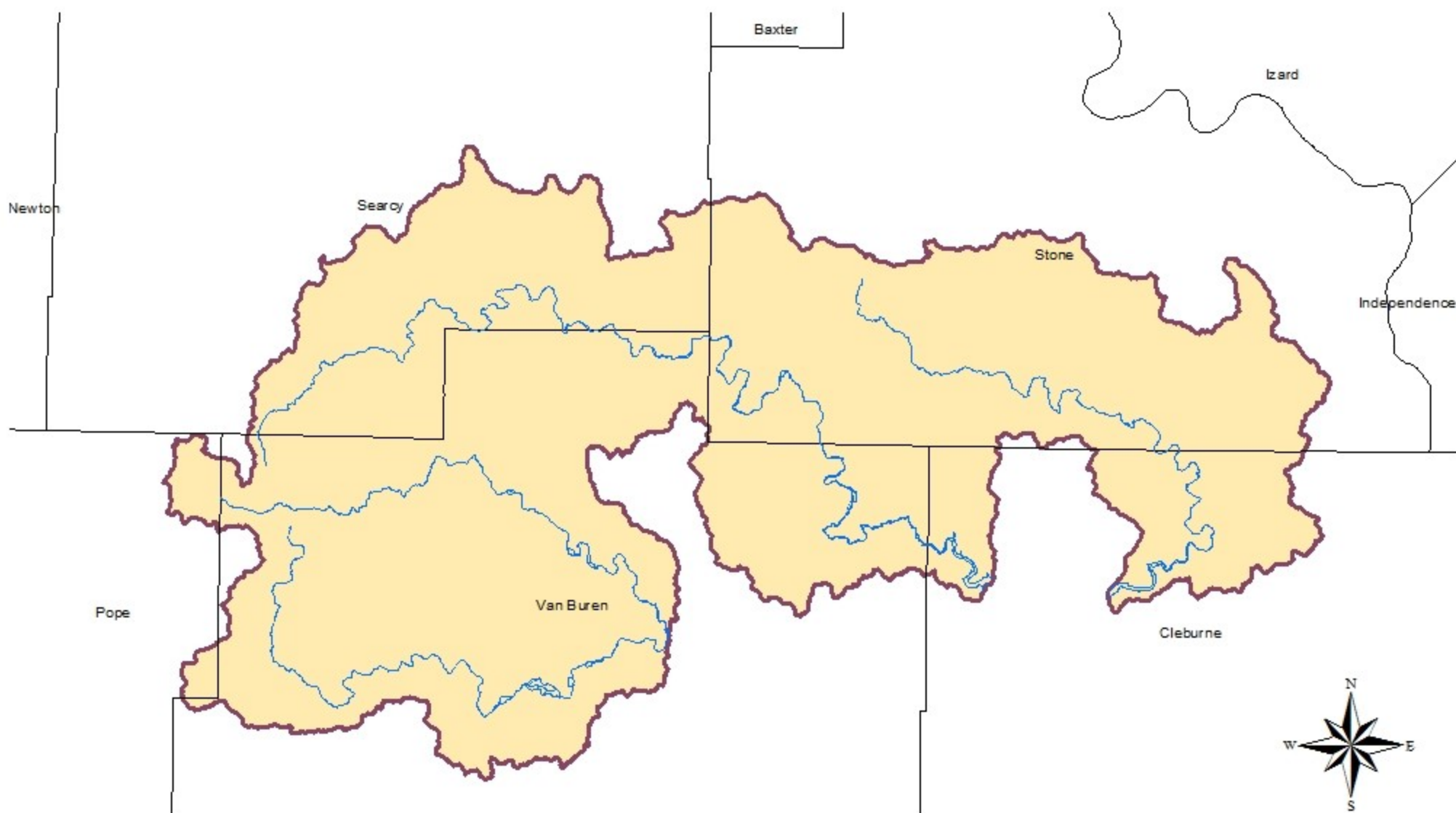
NRCS or TSP SIGNATURE

DATE

Ouachita-Caddo-Saline Rivers Safe Harbor/Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances Program Eligibility Area



Upper Little Red River Watershed SHA/CCAA Area



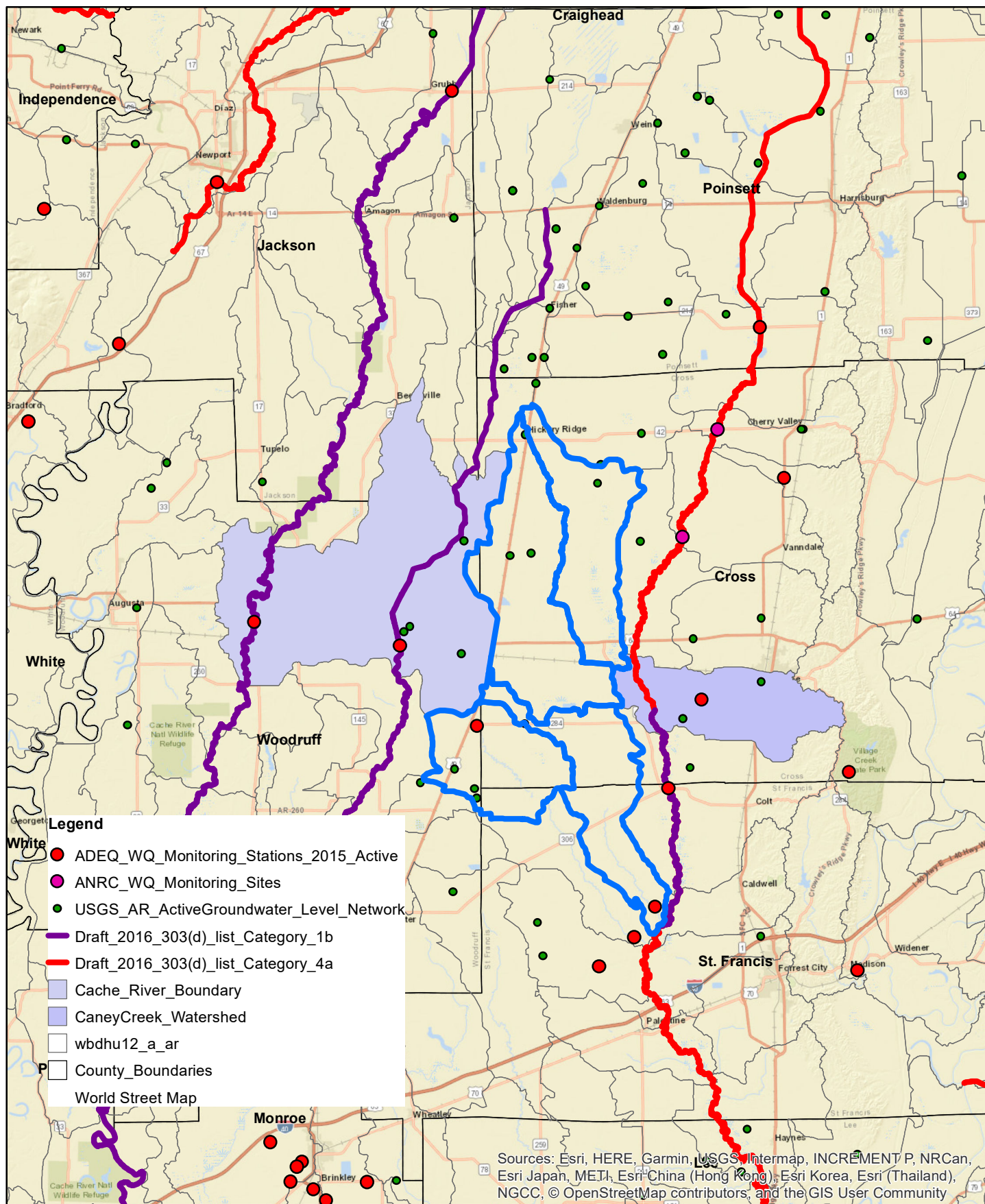
Legend

— ULRR_SHA_CCAA_Forks

Area of Eligibility

0 2.5 5 10 15 20 Miles

MBRI Project FY2020

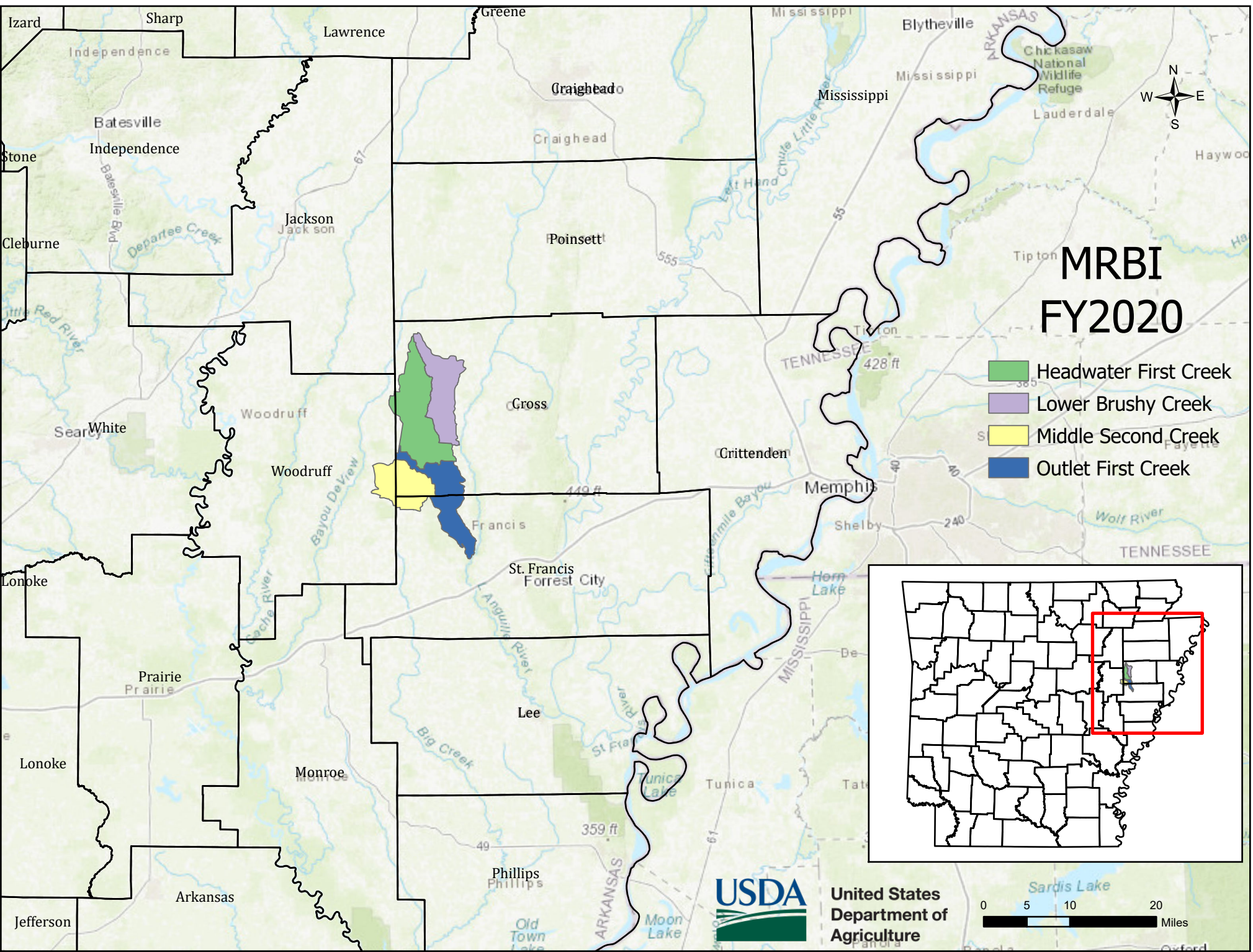


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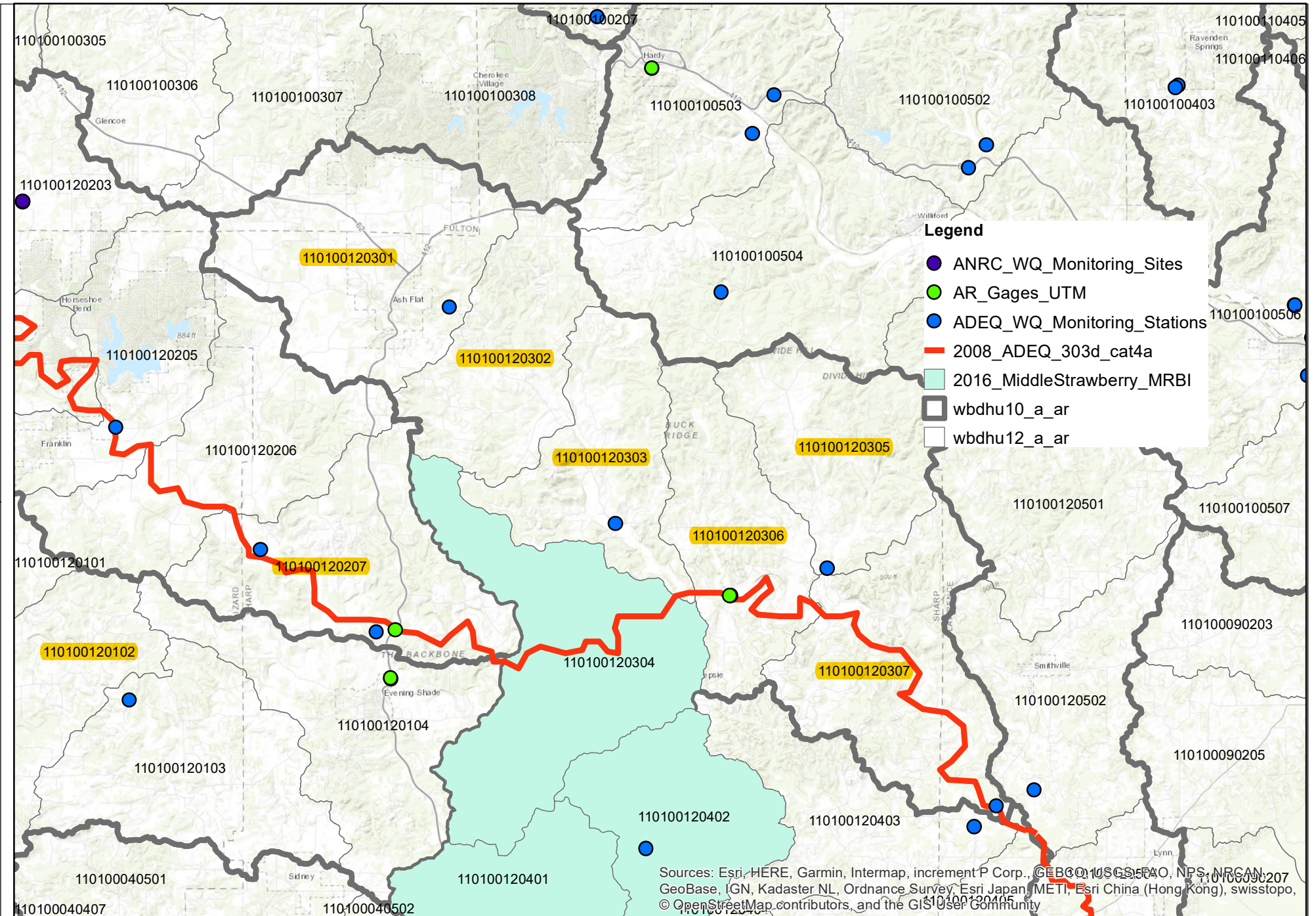


19,000 0 19,000 38,000 57,000 76,000 Feet

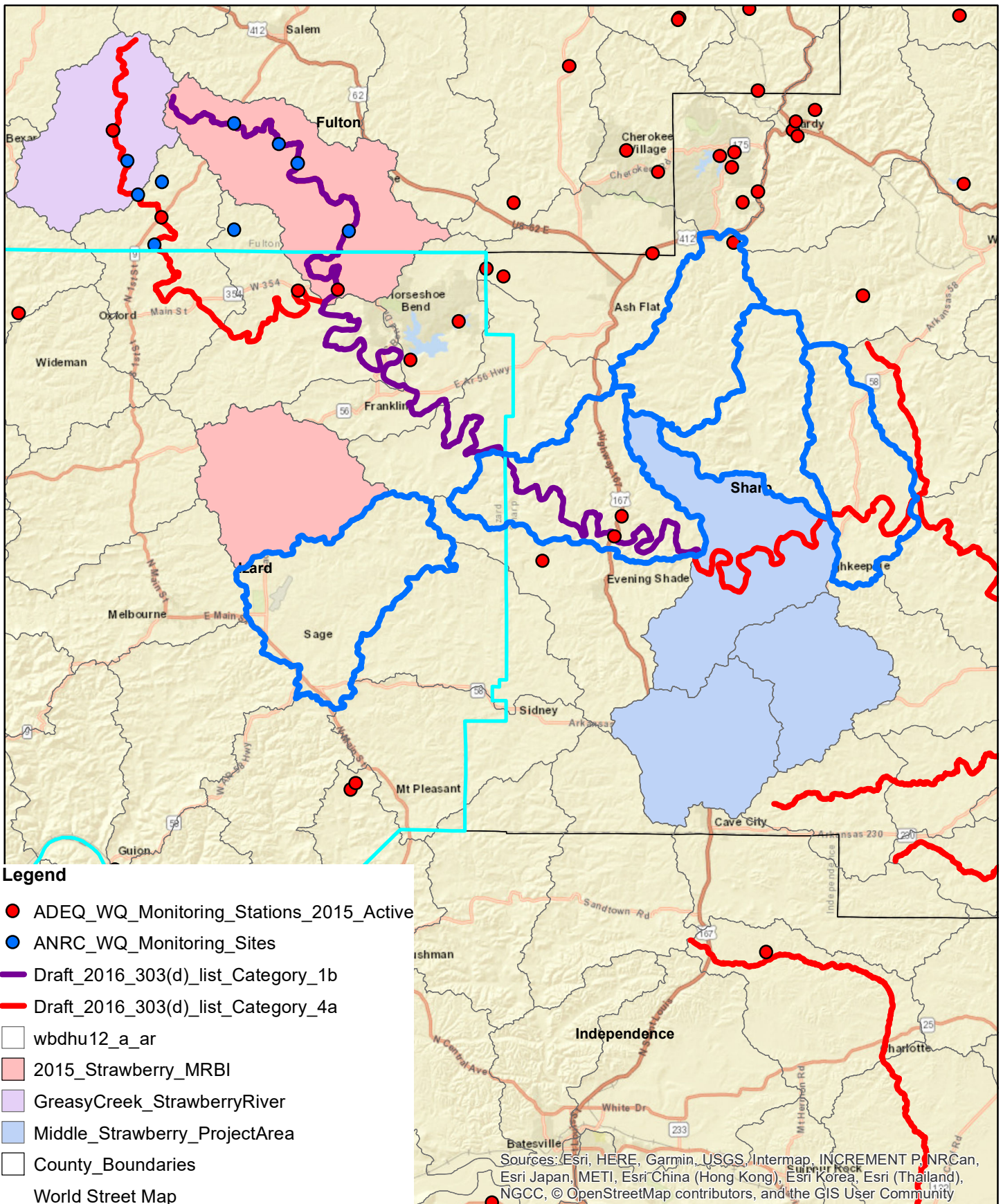




Strawberry River Possible NWQI Watersheds



NWQI Project Requests FY2020



14,000 0 14,000 28,000 42,000 56,000 Feet



NRCS State Technical Committee Meeting-May 9, 2019

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