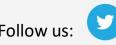


Welcome to *The Current*, the North Central Region Water Network's Speed Networking Webinar Series

## Building Human Capital in Conservation and Watershed Work: 2PM CT

- 1. Submit your questions for presenters via the Q&A panel. There will be a dedicated Q&A session following the last presentation. The Q&A panel can be found via the Q&A icon at the bottom of the webinar screen.
- 2. If you are experiencing technical issues or have questions about the North Central Region Water Network or *The Current* Webinar Series, please use the chat feature. The chat feature is accessible via chat icon at the bottom of the webinar screen.
- 3. A phone-in option can be accessed by clicking the up arrow on the mute icon and clicking 'Switch to Phone Audio'.

This session will be recorded and available at northcentralwater.org.



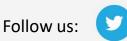




#### Today's Presenters:

- Clare Lindahl, CEO, Soil and Water Conservation Society: "Results from New Poll offer Boots-on-the-Ground Insight on Improving the Nation's Conservation Delivery System"
- **Jenny Seifert**, Watershed Outreach Specialist, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension: "Why Human Capital Matters for Clean Water, and How a New Collaborative is Building It"

Follow @northcentralh2o and #TheCurrent on Twitter for live tweets!









#### Clare Lindahl

Clare Lindahl became the CEO of the Soil and Water Conservation Society in August of 2017. The Society's mission is to foster the science and art of natural resource conservation. The Society and its membership have been advancing conservation through advocacy, special projects, a scientific journal, education, and events since 1943.

Lindahl previously served as the Executive Director for Conservation Districts of lowa and as Natural Resources Program Manager with River Action, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to fostering the environmental, economic, and cultural vitality of the Mississippi River and its riverfront in the Quad Cities. Lindahl has worked with communities and farmers through the Scott County Soil and Water Conservation District and Partners of Scott County Watersheds in Davenport to improve water quality in Duck Creek and other local streams that flow into the Mississippi River.

She holds a degree in landscape architecture from Iowa State and received her post-baccalaureate certificate in environmental geographic systems from Western Illinois University. A native of Moline, Illinois, Lindahl currently works and resides in Des Moines, Iowa.







# The Conservation Practitioner Poll (CPP): An Annual Survey to Help Improve Conservation Engagement

Clare Lindahl, CEO Soil and Water Conservation Society





- Established in 1943
- The Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) is the professional association for conservationists
- Interdisciplinary organization
- Science and practice focus
- Members and chapters nationwide, internationally (Join us!)
- Headquartered in Ankeny, Iowa









### What Does SWCS Do?

- Conferences and trainings
- Journal of Soil and Water Conservation, an applied science journal
- Communication of science and practice
- Special projects and grants
- Advocacy
- Engaging the next generation in conservation and agriculture
- Historical preservation of our movement
- Networks and connections
- Leadership (locally and nationally)





## Why a Conservation Practitioner Poll?

- Conservation practitioners (CPs): The field staff of conservation agencies and organizations who work directly with farmers and landowners to address soil and water conservation issues
- CPs are in the field implementing conservation: They understand policy, program, and outreach strengths and weaknesses best
- CPs are the most important part of the US soil and water conservation system
- Recent research has found that interaction with a conservation professional over time is a consistent predictor of farmer adoption of conservation practices (Morris and Arbuckle 2021)
- However, CP perspectives are not sufficiently heard. The Conservation Practitioner Poll seeks to better bring their voices into policy and program development for all of us!



# Conservation Practitioner Poll Project Team, supported by the Walton Family Foundation



- Clare Lindahl, SWCS CEO, worked in a field office for 3 years, worked for lowa SWCDs for 5 years
- Catherine DeLong, SWCS Special Projects and Policy Director at the time, soil scientist, now with Iowa State University Extension
- Iowa State University (ISU) researchers Dr.
  J. Arbuckle, Professor of Rural Sociology
  and Extension and director of the Iowa
  Farm and Rural Life Poll, and
- Chris Morris, Ph.D. student in Rural Sociology and Sustainable Agriculture and former 15-year conservationist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)



## What is the Conservation Practitioner Poll?

- Developed by CPs for CPs
- Focus groups with CPs across region to identify issues and potential areas of survey inquiry
- CPs from focus groups reviewed draft survey
- Anonymous
- Research based, statistically significant
- Online survey sent in May-June 2021 to 1,712 CPs
- 415 respondents = 24% response rate



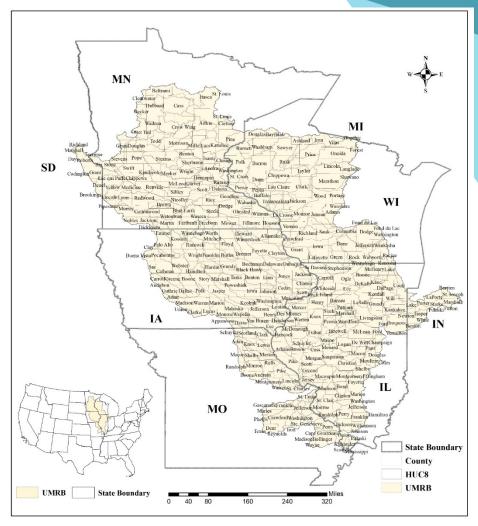




## What is the Conservation Practitioner Poll (CPP)?



- Inaugural Survey in 2021: Conservation Practitioners (CPs) from six Upper Mississippi River Basin states: Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, and Wisconsin
- CPs from NRCS, county Soil and Water Conservation Districts, state ag and conservation agencies, watershed groups, and wildlife groups





## Relationships are Key

- Survey participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of different approaches that conservation practitioners use
  to work with farmers to get conservation on the ground. Ranked as effective or highly effective:
  - "Building long-term relationships with farmers/ landowners through multiple interactions over time" (99%)
  - "Working face-to-face with farmers/landowners in the field" (97%)
  - "Working face-to-face with farmers/landowners in your office" (86%)
  - The focus group participants centered a substantial amount of discussion on the relative effectiveness of different ways that their organizations use to initiate and establish relationships with farmers and landowners. Ranked as effective or highly effective:
  - "Introductions from trusted farmers" the most effective approach (82%)
  - "Introductions from trusted conservation practitioners" and "Attending meetings (e.g., field days) that farmers and landowners attend" were rated as the second and third most effective approaches (70% and 69%, respectively)
  - "Targeting opinion leader farmers" (59%)
- Additionally, there was 90% agreement that conservation organizations should facilitate more face-to-face time with farmers and landowners.
- Employee turnover and a lack of field staff are negatively impacting conservation with the majority of CPs agreeing that "High employee turnover among conservation practitioners negatively impacts conservation momentum" (90%) and "Lack of field staff reduces my office's ability to get conservation on the ground" (78%).
- Virtual and other outreach tactics ranked in poll as well.

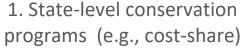


## Cost Share Programs are Important

- Ninety-two percent of participants rated "Cost share programs" as an effective approach in working with farmers to get conservation on the ground.
- However, focus group discussions about experiences working with different types programs suggested that that some programs are easier than others to administer.
- The focus groups brought out the challenges of program implementation to getting conservation on the ground. The challenges impacted the ability of the CP and the participation of the client. The poll results rank these challenges and potential solutions.

#### Conservation Program Administration: Percent Easy/Very Easy

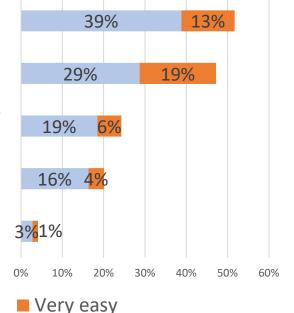
Note: 10 programs rated on a 5-point scale from "Very difficult" to "Very easy."



- 2. Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)
- 3. Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
- 4. Environmental Quality
  Incentives Program (EQIP)
  10. Conservation

Stewardship Program (CSP)

Easv





## Carbon Capture and Ecosystems Service Payment Programs

#### TABLE 7

Perspectives on privately funded carbon capture and ecosystem service payment programs.

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
Are farmers you work with inquiring about privately funded ecosystems service payment programs?	27	53	20
Do you think such programs have potential to make positive impacts on conservation practice adoption?	51	11	38
Would you like to receive training and information to help you assist farmers and landowners when they ask about privately funded ecosystems service payment programs?	61	16	23

#### **TABLE 6**

Knowledge of privately funded carbon capture and ecosystem service payment programs.

Level of Knowledge	%
Not at all knowledgeable	64
Slightly knowledgeable	26
Somewhat knowledgeable	8
Knowledgeable	2
Very knowledgeable	0



### Climate Change and Climate Smart Ag

TA	BLE 8		
Perspectives on discussions with farmers invo	olving climate a	nd agriculture	e.
Question	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
Does discussion of climate change help engage farmers/landowners in conservation?	19	59	22
Does discussion of climate change help get conservation on the ground?	18	57	24
Are you comfortable offering technical assistance about climate-smart agriculture?	37	45	18
Would you like to receive training and information about climate-smart agriculture?	68	19	14

"In my area climate change is still a hot-button/divisive issue. Some farmers are strongly nonbelievers, and discussing the 'climate change' aspects of ag can bring any conversation to a halt."



### **Targeting Conservation**

- Seventy-eight percent agreed that conservation needs should be evaluated at
  the watershed/landscape level to identify the most important sources of nutrient
  loss or other problems and 72% thought targeted conservation is a good idea
  because limited resources should be spent where they have the most impact.
- However the lowest level of agreement was for the statement, "Conservation tends to be planned and applied to address the greatest local environmental concerns," with 40% agreeing with this statement and 29% disagreeing. This statement also had the highest proportion of participants reporting uncertainty about the statement, at 31%.
- Participants were fairly equally divided regarding the statement, "Financial assistance for conservation tends to be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis," with 47% agreeing with the statement and 38% disagreeing.



### Ag Retailers and Absentee Landowners

#### **TABLE 4 CONTINUED**

Agreement with statements related to the workplace, programs, and interactions with farmers.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Outreach-oriented Conservation organizations should facilitate more face-to-face time with farmers and landowners	0	1	9	58	32
Lack of field staff reduces my office's capacity to get conservation on the ground	1	8	14	36	42
Soil and water conservation agencies should develop stronger partnerships with agricultural retailers	1	5	26	52	17
More effort should be put into outreach to nonoperator landowners	1	5	29	47	18

The majority of CPs agreed with the statements, "Soil and water conservation agencies should develop stronger partnerships with agricultural retailers" (69%) "More effort should be put into outreach to non-operator landowners" (65%).

Areas that had some of the highest levels of uncertainty among CPs were 26% indicating uncertainty about agricultural retailers and 29% indicating uncertainty about non-operator landowners.



## Ag Background of CPs in Basin

#### **TABLE 14**

Respondent experience in agriculture.

Experience	%
Any of your close family members or friends currently farm	73
You regularly visited a farm as a child/youth	63
You lived on a farm growing up	54
You currently live on a farm	35
You currently farm as an occupation part-time	27
You are a nonoperator landowner	16
Outside of your profession you have little or no background in agriculture/farming	16
You farmed as an occupation (full or part-time) in the past, but not now	14
You currently farm as an occupation full-time	3

Note: Participants were asked to "check all that apply" for this question, so the percentages do not add to 100.



## Training CPs Have and Are Interested In

TABLE 9					
Educational and training background.					
Subject	No Training at All (%)	Very Little Training (%)	Some Training (%)	A Lot of Training (%)	
Soil science	3	13	52	32	
Environmental science	4	17	46	33	
Water resources management	5	21	49	25	
Agronomy	8	18	43	31	
Wildlife management	9	27	36	29	
Agricultural engineering	15	22	36	27	
Communications	9	29	50	13	
Forestry	13	31	45	12	
Animal ecology	16	36	31	17	
Animal science/livestock management	13	40	38	9	
Agricultural economics/economics	15	41	40	4	
Urban conservation	29	39	25	6	
Marketing/sales	31	40	25	5	

30

36

Rural sociology/sociology

Psychology

		TABLE 10			
Level of interest in professional development activities.					
Activity	Not at All Interested (%)	Slightly Interested (%)	Somewhat Interested (%)	Interested (%)	Very Interested (%)
Wildlife habitat management	4	10	22	39	25
Agricultural technology	4	14	23	42	17
Agricultural production practices	5	13	24	42	16
Precision conservation technology (e.g., Agricultural Conservation Planning Framework)	4	15	25	35	22
Economics of agriculture	5	12	28	41	15
Conservation planning	5	12	28	34	22
Soil science	4	12	29	35	20
Precision agriculture technology	6	15	25	36	18
Water resources management	6	17	24	37	16
Project management	8	15	25	35	17
Leadership	8	18	26	35	14
Engineering	14	21	20	31	15
Promoting behavior change	15	18	24	27	17
In-person communications strategies and skills	12	20	25	31	12
Carbon markets	16	20	25	22	17
Ecosystem services markets	16	21	26	21	16
Trust building strategies	15	19	31	24	11
Urban conservation	19	24	24	21	11
Grant writing	25	21	22	21	10
Media communications strategies	15	25	31	20	9
Marketing/sales	17	24	30	23	6

22

22



## **Being Heard**

Conservation Practitioners (CPs) appreciated being heard.
 These quotes were entered by respondents in the open answer portion of the poll.

"I think it's really great knowledge, especially if it can be shared...after the fact as well. I know that everyone likes to see the results, right?"

-CPP

"You did an excellent job of hitting the hot topics from an employee field office perspective"

-CPP



### **CP Motivations**

- Face-to-face approaches are the best for establishing trusting relationships and getting practices on the ground
- It's also the most enjoyable part of CPs' jobs



Indiana NRCS photo by Carly Whitmore

"...one on one with farmers, I would say, always ends up being the most effective. And small conversations end up leading to their adoption of practices and then their neighbors and then their sons."

-Watershed coordinator, Iowa

"I feel most effective whenever we're actually out meeting with the producers and having that face to face contact with them."

-District conservationist, Iowa



### **Next Steps**

- Distribute results widely, www.swcs.org/cpp
- In-depth analysis of data (e.g., comparison of results by organization, state, age, etc.)
- Work with soil and water conservation community to inform discussion of improving strengths and addressing weaknesses in policies, programs and training
- Prepare for Next Conservation Practitioner Poll in 2023

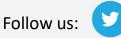


#### Jenny Seifert



Jenny Seifert is the Watershed Outreach Specialist for the North Central Region Water Network at UW-Madison Division of Extension. In this role, she leads programs that build human and social capital for achieving clean water, healthy soils, and thriving communities. Her expertise is in environmental communications and outreach, and she's done this work for research institutions and nonprofits for over a decade.

She has a joint Master's degree in Life Science Communication and Environment and Resources from UW-Madison and a Bachelor's degree in German from the University of Virginia.











## Why Human Capital Matters for Clean Water, and How a New Collaborative Wants to Grow It

Jenny Seifert | Watershed Outreach Specialist | UW-Madison Extension and North Central Region Water Network



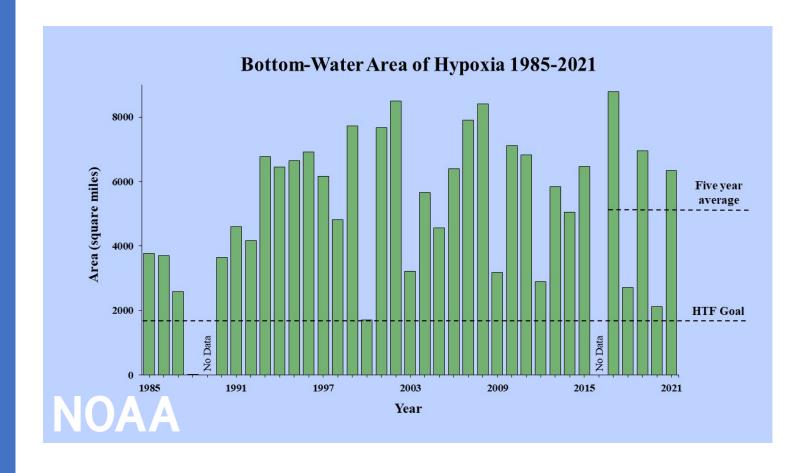
### A Wicked Problem

Despite decades of research and innovation to solve freshwater challenges, we are falling short of our clean water goals.

## We need to take leaps

We are only running in place.

Climate change will make progress harder.



## The problem starts and ends with people.



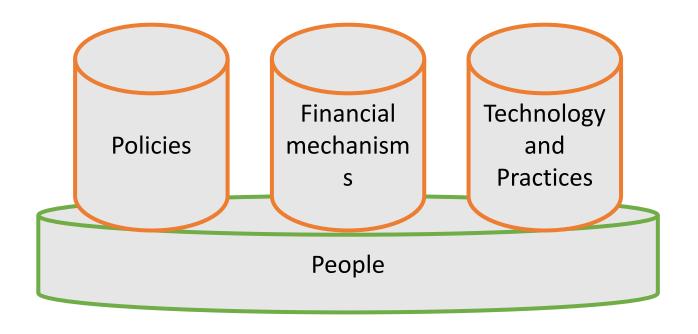






We've made leaps with technology and practices, but we aren't investing enough in the **people** necessary to put that innovation on the ground.

Pillars for Moving the Needle on Clean Water



## Human Capital for Watershed Management



"Skilled and trained personnel in leadership or management roles are crucial to the effective implementation of any initiative."

Successful Watershed
Management in the Midwest:
Getting to Scale
https://northcentralwater.org/file
s/2019/04/successful-watershedmanagement-in-the-midwestFINAL.pdf

## The "Who" of Human Capital

- Conservation and watershed professionals
- Farmers
- Landowners
- Civic leaders
- Community leaders





Core Competencies for Watershed Professionals

Technical skills e.g., best management practices, hydrological processes

**Policy knowledge** e.g., state water quality regulations, land-use policies

Management skills e.g., project management, working with boards

Leadership skills e.g., outreach and communication, facilitation, partnerships

Source: Koundinya et al, 2018. Core Competencies for Successful Watershed Management Practitioners. Journal of Extension



## Let's just say this again...

"In-person work with farmers and landowners, whether in the office or in the field, is most effective [for relationship and trust building]."

- Key Finding #1 from the 2021
 Conservation Practitioner Poll by
 SWCS & Iowa State University

Human capital cultivates social capital

"You bring lake people to my farm, and I'll bring farmers to your lakes."

~ John Eron, farmer and cofounder of Farmers of Mill Creek



## Human capital is currently insufficient



Photo source: The Gazette

Rose Danaher is a watershed coordinator with the lowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. She was the 5th coordinator in 6 years on her current project. She says high turnover among watershed coordinators is a problem, and there is a need for a stronger community of practice.

None of these watershed coordinators are in their positions anymore. They have moved on, in part, because of a lack of job security.

Photo taken in 2018



Photo source: Iowa Ag Water Alliance

# Job insecurity undermines human capital

- Funding stability and consistency is highly ranked factor for staying in positions
- Professionals with fewer than 2 years in their roles are less satisfied with job benefits
- Professionals with 3-10 years are less satisfied with job security
- Bottom line: Long-term investment in people is necessary

Findings from Leadership for Midwestern Watershed's Watershed Leader Survey. November 2020

## Human capital is insufficient among farmers too

"Leadership fatigue" and burnout among farmer leaders is real.

Some farmer-led groups are struggling with how to recruit new farmers.



### Causes of Insufficiency

Gaps in coverage of watershed training and peer learning for both watershed professionals and farmers

Both watershed professionals and farmer leaders can often feel isolated

Limited capacity to innovate existing trainings

Demanding jobs with lots of expectations and poor compensation

Insufficient political will to invest in human capital



## The Confluence for Watershed Leaders

A multi-partner, multi-state collaborative for professional development, peer learning, and networking



**Skills accelerator:** Professional development and resources to equip watershed leaders with key skills grounded in the latest science

**Resource accelerator:** Pool of expertise and resources to develop innovative trainings and learning experiences efficiently



**Network builder:** A lively community of practice for watershed leaders throughout the Midwest and Mid-South

**Profession builder:** Potential development of a professional certification for watershed professionals

Narrative builder: Amplification of the need to invest in people to meet soil and water conservation goals

### Connections make us stronger









- 4 founding partners: NCRWN, Soil and Water Conservation Society, Sand County Foundation, Fishers and Farmers Partnership
- 13 Land Grant Universities
   with watershed science and
   outreach specialists, including
   6 watershed academies
- 5 non-profits that focus on building watershed or conservation leadership
- **3 federal agencies:** NRCS, EPA, USFWS

## The long-term impacts we hope to make

More watershed leaders are confident and successful at putting innovation on the ground

Watershed professionals receive greater support and stay longer in their positions

More farmers are practicing conservation

Watersheds have enough people power to recover and thrive

There are measurable reductions in nutrient loads and cleaner freshwater



We need to invest in people to meet clean water goals.



- Successful Watershed Management in the Midwest: Getting to Scale: <a href="https://northcentralwater.org/files/2019/04/s">https://northcentralwater.org/files/2019/04/s</a> <a href="uccessful-watershed-management-in-the-midwest-FINAL.pdf">uccessful-watershed-management-in-the-midwest-FINAL.pdf</a>
- NCRWN's Watershed Leadership programming: <a href="https://northcentralwater.org/watershed-leadership/">https://northcentralwater.org/watershed-leadership/</a>
- Human Capital blog series: <a href="https://northcentralwater.org/tag/human-capital/">https://northcentralwater.org/tag/human-capital/</a>
- Training Needs for Farmer Leaders: <a href="https://northcentralwater.org/files/2019/07/">https://northcentralwater.org/files/2019/07/</a> MARBreport-7-2019.pdf

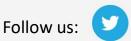


#### **Question and Answer Session**

We will draw initial questions and comments from those submitted via the chat box during the presentations.

#### **Today's Speakers**

Clare Lindahl — <u>clare.lindahl@swcs.org</u> Jenny Seifert — <u>jenny.seifert@wisc.edu</u>







### Thank you for participating in today's *The Current!*

Visit our website, northcentralwater.org, to access the recording and our webinar archive!

Upcoming Soil Health Digital Café from our soil health team, The Soil Health Nexus:

Can We Quantify Soil Biological Activity Without a Lab?

Next Wednesday, November 17<sup>th</sup> at 2pm CT

https://soilhealthnexus.org/

