



# Leadership for Midwestern Watersheds

## AGENDA

**FEBRUARY 27-28, 2025**  
**STARVED ROCK LODGE & CONFERENCE CENTER**  
ONE LODGE LANE, OGLESBY, IL 61348

A NETWORK FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AMONG AGRICULTURAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

\* all sessions meet in the Starved Rock Room, all meals are served in the Great Hall \*

### Wednesday, February 26th

7:00 PM Pre-event social (La Salle Room)

### Thursday, February 27th

8:00 AM Registration and breakfast

9:00 AM Morning sessions:

**Welcome and Introductions** – *Craig Ficenec and Haleigh Summers, Sand County Foundation*

**Regenerative Leadership: Principles for Navigating Your Toughest Challenges** – *Ryan Erisman, Odyssey Consulting, LLC*

**Farmer Leadership Case Studies and Panel Discussion** – *Multiple Farmers from the Midwest*

12:00 PM Buffet lunch

1:00 PM Afternoon sessions:

**The Evolution of Wisconsin's Producer-Led Program** – *Dani Heisler, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection*

**Farmer Panel Discussion** – *Wisconsin Producer-Led Watershed Protection Group Leaders*

**Updates from the Diverse Corn Belt project: Enhancing Rural Resilience through Landscape Diversity in the Midwest** – *Emily Usher-DeaKyne, Purdue University*

**Facilitated Small Group Discussions**

5:30 PM Happy hour followed by group dinner

### Friday, February 28th

7:30 AM Breakfast

8:00 AM Morning sessions:

**Farmer-Industry Collaboration to Meet Climate and Water Conservation Goals** – *Jim Eckberg, General Mills*

**The Conservation Practitioner Poll: What Do CPs Need to Get More Conservation on the Ground?** – *Catherine DeLong, Iowa State University*

**Farmer Leadership Case Studies and Facilitated Discussion** – *Multiple Farmers from the Midwest*

**Closing Activity**

12:00 PM Buffet lunch, and adjourn

Presented by Sand County Foundation and partners, with financial support from North-Central SARE and the following sponsors.





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**SPEAKER BIOS**  
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**Catherine DeLong - Water Quality Program Manager, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach**

Catherine works to bring people together to share resources, ideas and perspectives about water quality, and to help Iowans understand the role they can play in Iowa's water future. She has an MS degree in soil science from Iowa State University, and a BA in international relations from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. Catherine has experience at all levels of conservation, having previously worked for the county-level Soil and Water Conservation Districts as well as an international non-profit serving conservation professionals.



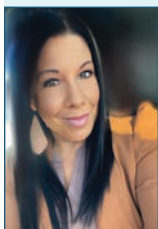
**Jim Eckberg - Senior Scientist, General Mills**

Jim leads programs that empower farmers with data to drive sustainable solutions that improve farm economics. He works with farmers, their advisors, and scientists to reduce emissions in the dairy industry. He translates this work to business leaders to rethink and reimagine the way industry invests in sustainability programs focusing on practical solutions that add value to farms. Jim completed a Masters in ecology (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) and PhD in agroecology (University of Minnesota).



**Ryan Erisman - Odyssey Consulting, LLC**

Ryan grew up on an innovative Illinois grain and livestock farm and left for the challenges of the Marines, where he commanded a rifle company in combat and counterinsurgency operations in Iraq. Today, Ryan raises pastured pork, grass-fed beef, and feed crops in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin using regenerative practices. He founded Odyssey Collaborations to help sustainability leaders navigate complex challenges, cultivate high-impact change, and create well-being for themselves, their organizations, and their communities.



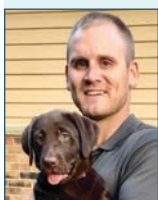
**Dani Heisler - Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program Manager, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection**

Dani supports 50 producer-led groups throughout Wisconsin in her role with Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. In addition to sharing her passion for agricultural conservation, she practices the art and science of managed grazing in Wisconsin's Driftless Area. Dani grew up on a beef operation in western Wisconsin, and received a Bachelor of Science, studying animal science, agronomy, and food science at the University of Wisconsin at River Falls.



**Scott Hendricks - Conservation Agronomist, Dubuque County Watersheds**

Scott works with Dubuque County farmers to identify and implement conservation practices that benefit their bottom line and the county's watersheds. His work focuses on soil health and helping farmers improve their return-on-investment. He also helps implement conservation practices with a renter on his family farm near Dubuque, where he also enjoys hunting and fishing. Scott also loves to travel, hike, and camp.



**Erik Joost - Watershed Manager, City of Oconomowoc**

Erik guides Oconomowoc's adaptive management program to reach compliance with phosphorous water quality standards in the Oconomowoc River. The program, started in 2015, focuses on watershed-wide P reduction strategies, including land management practices, lake improvements and stream restorations. Erik also helps to coordinate the Farmers for Lake Country producer-led group, which fosters peer-to-peer learning about farming strategies that promote soil health and preserve water quality.



### John Koepke - Koepke Farms Inc.

John is a member of Koepke Farms Inc., a family partnership milking 320 cows, cultivating 1,000 acres of crops, and managing 150 acres of woods and wetlands. The Koepkes were early adopters of sustainable practices, including no-till farming, contour strip cropping, diversified crop rotation, nutrient management, cover crops, and grassed waterways. As a leader in the ag community, John has helped shape key policies at the local and state level. His commitment to preserving his family's land reflects his dedication to protecting farmland across Wisconsin.



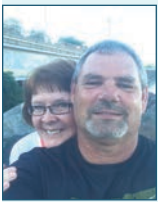
### Paul Meuer - Land Protection Manager, Tall Pines Conservancy

Tall Pines Conservancy is a nationally accredited land trust in southeast Wisconsin's Lake Country region. An experienced conservation professional, Paul has worked nationwide as a professional wetland scientist, restoration ecologist, and environmental consultant. At Tall Pines, he leads efforts to protect land through conservation easements and acquisitions, while stewarding properties like the 260-acre Ravensholme Farm Preserve. Paul is dedicated to preserving natural resources and supporting sustainable land management.



### Tony Peirick - T&R Dairy

Tony is the President of the Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil-Healthy Water group. He is a partner in T&R Dairy farm near Watertown, Wisconsin, with 200 dairy cows and 1,100 acres of corn for grain and silage, soybeans, and forages. Tony has been experimenting with cover crops for 12 years and has been planting green for the past 7 years. His farm also does custom spraying and harvesting as well as planting cover crops for his neighbors.



### Bradley Robson - Robson Family Farm

Brad grew up on a small dairy farm in the hills of Vernon County, Wisconsin, where he now raises hay, corn, soybeans, small grains, alternative forages, cover crops, prairie strips, and a cow-calf herd on pasture. He farms in partnership with his parents and son. Brad is a co-founder and farmer leader of the Hill Country Watershed Alliance. He chairs the Valley Stewardship Network and is a conservation agronomist with the Monroe County Land Conservation Department.



### Emily Usher-DeaKyne - Diverse Corn Belt Project Manager, Purdue University

Emily is a natural resource social scientist at Purdue. She values the environmental, economic, and social opportunities our natural environment provides. Understanding the balance between these three components drives her research interests in motivators and barriers to adoption of diversified ag systems, public policy development, and community engagement. A Midwest native, Emily enjoys gardening and spending time with her family, friends, and pets.

#### Planning Team:

**Catherine DeLong**, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

**Craig Ficenecc**, Sand County Foundation

**Ryan Heiniger**, Conservation Technology Information Center

**Krista Kirkham**, The Nature Conservancy

**Shelby Leick**, American Farmland Trust

**Jenny Seifert**, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension

**Haleigh Summers**, Sand County Foundation

**Todd Sutphin**, Iowa Soybean Association

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