

SPEAKERS
MARCH 30-
APRIL 1



LEADERSHIP FOR MIDWESTERN WATERSHEDS

*A network for knowledge exchange
among agricultural watershed
management professionals.*

2022 Meeting: Cultivating Leadership



Eric Allness, Acting State Conservationist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

In Eric's 16 years of experience with USDA NRCS, he has held positions at the field, area and state level, including his current posts as Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships, and Acting State Conservationist for Wisconsin. Eric is a Wisconsin native who enjoys all outdoor pursuits, especially hunting and fishing.



Mary Elise Antoine, President, Prairie du Chien Historical Society Mary is the former curator at Villa Louis. Her research focuses on the material culture and mix and confrontation of cultures on the upper Mississippi prior to Wisconsin statehood. Mary is co-author of *Frenchtown Chronicles of Prairie du Chien: History and Folklore from Wisconsin's Frontier* and author of *The War of 1812 in Wisconsin*, which received the 2017 Board of Curators Book of Merit Award.



Lauren Asprooth, PhD Candidate, Geography Graduate Program, University of California-Davis

A Midwestern native, Lauren researches a range of strategies, from grassroots to top-down efforts, to encourage growers in the Corn Belt to use conservation practices. Currently she is studying the formal farmer network of Practical Farmers of Iowa and its role in supporting farmers to transition to more sustainable practices, as well as how farm policies can encourage diversification of corn and soybean rotations to include small grains.



Jessica Beckendorf, Community Development Educator, University of Wisconsin Extension, Waupaca County

Jessica's work is currently focused on social connectedness and leadership development, including overseeing the long-running Leadership Waupaca County program. She also holds an appointment with the Military Families Learning Network, studying networks and network weaving.



Tom Cotter, Owner and Operator, Cotter Farms

Tom is a fourth-generation farmer from southern Minnesota. Tom and his father began a journey leading to reduced tillage, cover crops and livestock grazing in the 1990s. Cotter Farms was the first in Mower County to be certified as a Clean Water Farm in 2016. Tom dedicates some acres to organic cash crops and grazing grass-fed beef. Tom has spoke about soil health at the national no-tillage and strip-tillage conferences.





Leif Fixen, North America Soil Health & Nutrient Strategy Manager, The Nature Conservancy

Leif develops and leads work with public and private organizations and businesses who service and advise farmers to adopt soil health practices, 4R nutrient stewardship practices, and edge of field practices that reduce agriculture’s impact on our water, and position agriculture as a natural climate solution. Previously, Leif was the Pacific Northwest Conservation Program Manager for American Farmland Trust. He grew up on a farm in South Dakota, and holds degrees in agronomy and forestry from South Dakota State University.



Amy Greil, Associate Professor of Community Resource Development, University of Wisconsin Extension

A member of UW Extension since 2011, Amy has engaged in a breadth of programming efforts and applied research in community economic development, nonprofit capacity building and leadership.



Mark Lefebvre, Conservation Planning Manager, Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District

Mark works with farmers and landowners to develop comprehensive plans to address natural resource concerns affecting soil and water quality and quantity. He provides direct technical assistance for nonstructural land management practices as well as nutrient management, irrigation management, and other practices. He also works with farmers and landowners to become certified through the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program.



Martha McFarland, Owner and Operator, Hawkeye Buffalo & Cattle Ranch Martha grazes bison and Hereford cattle on 260 acres of woods and pasture on her family’s farm in northeast Iowa, and manages 80 acres of farmland with a renter. Hawkeye Buffalo & Cattle Ranch sells bison and beef cuts directly to consumers, offers tours to view bison, and also sells seedstock Herefords to other beef producers.



Maggie Norton, Farmer Outreach Coordinator, Practical Farmers of Iowa Maggie encourages emerging farmer-leaders to take a more active role in peer learning, outreach and media opportunities. She provides farmers with resources, support and coaching to help them become more effective and confident storytellers and educators. Maggie is also the main point of contact for media inquiries. Before joining the PFI staff, Maggie completed her Master of Science in rural sociology and sustainable agriculture at Iowa State University.



Tony Peirick, Owner and Operator, T&R Dairy Tony is president of the Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil-Healthy Water group. He operates T&R Dairy near Watertown with his brother, son and nephew. They milk 200 dairy cows and grow 1,100 acres of corn, soybeans, and forages. Tony has been experimenting with cover crops for 10 years and has been ‘planting green’ for the past five years. The Peiricks have a custom spraying and harvesting business, and plant cover crops for neighbors.



Rachel Rushmann, Producer-Led Program Manager, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Rachel oversees the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program at DATCP and also manages the Door-Kewaunee Demo Farms Network. She also leads and facilitates work on the depth to bedrock technical standard and represents DATCP on several advisory groups, coalitions and committees to help meet conservation goals of the Land and Water Bureau. Rachel holds a B.S. in Agricultural and Applied Economics from UW-Madison.





Eric Schmechel, Watershed Program Director, Dubuque Soil & Water Conservation District

Eric works on agricultural and urban watershed management policies, projects, and programs. He began working with agricultural landowners on a cold-water trout stream project in 2007 and since has collaborated with the city and county of Dubuque on managing stormwater and floodplain permits, projects, and policies. With a watershed agreement completed in 2020, he now manages the Dubuque County Watersheds team working with agricultural and urban watershed components.



Jenny Seifert, Watershed Outreach Specialist, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension

Working under the North Central Region Water Network, Jenny leads collaborative projects that build capacity for success among conservation professionals and farmers in their efforts to protect soil and water resources. Previously, she worked in communications and outreach for environmental research institutions and nonprofits in California, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Germany. She also completed the Peace Corps on the island of St. Lucia. She has a joint Master's degree in Life Sciences Communication and Environment & Resources from the UW-Madison.



Jessica Jane Spayde, Community Development Educator, University of Wisconsin Extension, Crawford County

Jessica is a graduate from Michigan State University's Department of Sociology where she conducted doctoral coursework in Sociology. Her pioneering dissertation research through Cardiff University in sustainability governance and public food procurement provides the theoretical grounding for Courageous Connections through Relational Networking. Jessica is an avid hobby farmer and enjoys raising animals and gardening with her partner at their small farm in southwestern Wisconsin.



Loran Steinlage, Owner and Operator, FLOLO Farms

Located near West Union, Iowa, Loran is a lifelong farmer/fabricator and an equipment and no-till expert. He is on DAWN Equipment Company's engineering team with an emphasis on equipment designed for regenerative practices. Loran received the No-Till Innovator of the Year from *No-Till Farmer Magazine*, and the Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award.

Leadership for Midwestern Watersheds Planning Team

Craig Ficenec Program Director, Sand County Foundation

Liina Keerd Program Relations Coordinator, Sand County Foundation

Mike Komp Executive Director, Conservation Technology Information Center

Clare Lindahl CEO, Soil and Water Conservation Society

Heidi Peterson Vice President, Agricultural Research and Conservation, Sand County Foundation

Rebecca Power Director, North Central Region Water Network, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension

Kris Reynolds Midwest Director, American Farmland Trust

Todd Sutphin Senior Research Program Manager, Iowa Soybean Association Research Center for Farming Innovation

Jeff Tisl Northeast Iowa Regional Coordinator, Iowa Department of Agriculture

Julie Westerlund One Watershed, One Plan Coordinator, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

