



Wisconsin State Technical Committee

Thursday, January 18, 2024 | 9:30a.m. CST - Noon

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Agenda

Speaker	Topic
Josh Odekirk <i>Acting State Conservationist</i>	State Conservationist Report
Adam Dowling <i>Acting Watershed Coordinator</i>	Watershed Project Plans (Coon Creek, West Fork Kickapoo, Bear Creek)
David Gundlach <i>Assistant State Conservationist (ASTC) - Easements</i>	Easement Programs update
Adam Abel <i>State Grazing Specialist</i>	Grassland 2.0 Academy update
Twyla Kite <i>GLRI, MRBI, NWQI Program Coordinator</i>	Programs – ACT NOW – immediate approval of ranked applications for obligation.
Derrick Klimesh <i>ASTC – Compliance</i>	Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Compliance updates
Abby Johnson <i>Management Analyst - Partnerships</i> John White <i>State Outreach Coordinator</i>	Partnerships – Notice of Funding Opportunities updates and Outreach Efforts
Subcommittee Leads	Subcommittee Reports: Forestry, Soil Health, Wildlife, Source Water Protection, Urban & Community Agriculture
Partners	Partner reports
Ryan Gerlich <i>Acting ASTC - Partnerships</i>	2024 State Technical Advisory Committee meeting scheduling

Adjourn





Meeting Notes:

1. State Conservationist Report (Josh Odekirk, josh.odekirk@usda.gov)

a. Staffing

- i. Wisconsin will be posting for State Conservationist (was hoping for beginning of January)
- ii. Will be coordinated with the hiring of the State Conservationists in Louisiana and Oregon
- iii. Phil Rivera is on yearlong detail, so Betsy is acting ASTC-M&S for Phil
- iv. Jae Sutherland is acting Betsy
- v. Eric Allness is now State Conservationist for Kentucky, Ryan Gerlich acting ASTC – Partnerships until Eric’s position is filled.
- vi. Chris Borland is back from detail and will resume his position as Tribal Liaison, so Brian Briski will resume his position
- vii. Currently, WI NRCS has approximately 315 FTE’s
 - 1. We are at capacity for most offices
 - 2. We need to continue to staff up in the field offices to accommodate additional work from IRA funds
 - 3. Still under Continuous Resolution (CR) up to early March, so need to “frugal” with spending.

b. Farm Bill

- i. Still in the works and should be approved in the next couple of months

c. Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Funds Update

- i. EQIP and CSP Funds that were provided exceeded the amount we were expecting (unprecedented amounts)
- ii. Focus on Climate Smart related activities

	Farm Bill	IRA
CSP	\$20M (FY23)	+\$13M
EQIP	\$20M (FY23)	+\$26M

- iii. All funds need to be spent in FY24
- iv. We are expecting the same amount of additional funds over the next three years.
- v. There will be no change in contract caps for EQIP

2. Watershed & Flood Prevention Program (Adam Dowling, adam.dowling@usda.gov)

- a. New role to help Steve Becker and his Engineering team
- b. Watershed & Flood Prevention Operations (WPFO)
 - i. Decommissioned flood control acts from 1944 & 1954
- c. These are not NRCS led (request comes from the local sponsor)





- d. Program steps take 5-7 years to complete
- e. Funding started for the program in 2017
- f. Koshkonong Creek Watershed
 - i. Stretches have been straitened over the years leading to increased sediment
 - ii. If approved, the request moves to Preliminary Investigation Feasibility Report (PIFR)
- g. Black Earth Creek Watershed
 - i. 2008 flood had huge impact on watershed
 - ii. Sponsored by Dane County
- h. Bear Creek Watershed
 - i. Requires local sponsor
 - ii. Involves many different entities and policies
 - iii. Steve Becker conducted analysis
- i. Root River Watershed
 - i. Just beginning the planning process
- j. Coon Creek Watershed
 - i. Holding public meeting led by Steve Becker
 - ii. 12 dams constructed in early 1960's, 9 are being recommended for decommissioning
- 3. Easements Update (Dave Gundlach, david.gundlach@usda.gov)
 - a. Fund pool is nationally ranked
 - b. Worked with American Farmland Trusts
 - c. Focus was on depressional wetlands surrounded by damaged grasslands
 - d. Currently there is a holding pattern with state level funding
 - e. WRE was created as the terms don't match RCPP terms
- 4. Grazing Grasslands 2.0 (Adam Abel, adam.abel@usda.gov; Alex Steussy-Williams, alex.steussywilliams@wisc.edu)
 - a. Provides structure for grazing training
 - b. Consulted and discussed objectives with all potential partners (farmers, landowners, NRCS, UW, etc.)
 - c. Grasslands 1.0
 - i. Focused on Oak/Savanna ecosystem (largest in Midwest)
 - d. Grasslands 2.0
 - i. Focuses on naturally managed grasslands
 - ii. Academy
 - 1. Community building to preserve grasslands
 - 2. Meeting NRCS Standards for Grazing Conservation Plan
 - 3. 67 members completed the Foundations program
 - 4. Hands on/online learning hybrid approach
 - 5. Participants got to meet grazing experts in person





6. 57 members completed the Four Seasons program (year around advance course)
7. Assignments (grazing plans) apply to real life farmer scenarios
8. Offers uniqueness
 - a. Diversity of participants and instructors
 - b. Set standards for engagement
 - c. Standards of Excellence
 - i. Certificate of completion – attend all events both in person and online
 - d. Community outlasts the course itself
 - e. Provides a great opportunity with all the IRA funds coming
 - f. Open to all partners
 - g. 2-year goal = 120-140 grazing planners
 - h. Sign up for the spring program is coming soon (Foundations program begins April 30)
 - i. RC&D planners have participated and have the opportunity to get the word out
 - j. TSP's can also get you connected, reach out to:
 - i. RC&D
 - ii. DC/LC's
5. ACT NOW Program Update (Twyla Kite, twyla.kite@usda.gov)
 - a. ACT Now is a program that allows for expedited application processing for top priority projects
 - b. 4 eligible watersheds are participating
 - c. Application deadline is May 17, 2024
 - d. Addresses agronomic and urgent seasonal needs
 - e. Wisconsin is late adopter as we wanted to see how the program worked in other states
6. Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Compliance Update (Derrick Klimesh, derrick.klimesh@usda.gov)
 - a. Started team in March 2023
 - i. 14 hiring actions
 - b. NHQ will post updated policies to public register soon
 - i. GIS – NRCS transferring to new system soon
 - ii. USDA Program wetland database (partnering with DNR)
7. Partnerships Update (Abby Johnson, abigale.johnson@usda.gov; John White (john.white2@usda.gov)
 - a. NOF Opportunities Update
 - i. 3 opportunities will be posted to grants.gov
 1. Cooperative Conservation Agreements





2. Community Agriculture Grants
 3. Tribal Conservation Grants
 - b. Outreach
 - i. Created WI Beginning Farmers Resource Guide
<https://farms.extension.wisc.edu/articles/wisconsin-beginning-farmers-resource-guide/>
 - ii. NRCS, FSA, DATCP, UW System and others were involved
 1. Available in other languages online
 - iii. We are noticing that a lot of new farmers are retirees from other professions
8. Subcommittee Updates
- a. Forestry Update (last met in October 2023)
 - i. Reviewed standards and scenarios developed
 1. Focus on wild fire prevention
 - b. Soil Health Update
 - i. Regrouping as sub-committee
 - c. Wildlife
 - i. Working on Oak/Savanna Guidelines/Scenarios
 - ii. Small scale planting – ½ acre
 - iii. Working with WI Prescribed Fire Council to provide training to NRCS staff
 - d. Source Water Protection
 - i. 10% conservation practices, stacking benefits
 - e. Urban/Small Scale Ag
 - i. Met three times (last time on 1/5/24)
 - ii. Working on two new practice standards
 1. Low tunnels
 2. Raised beds
 - iii. Challenges facing
 1. Soil testing hesitation
 2. Land access
 3. Water quality and quantity
 - iv. Potential Future Agenda topic: Have someone present on Milwaukee Urban Ag Program. (Kaitlin S)
9. Partner Updates
- a. FSA
 - i. Livestock Forage Program (LFP) and the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised (ELAP) deadline has been extended to January 30th, 2024.
 - ii. The late file deadline for the Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) is February 4th.
 - iii. The enrollment deadline for ARC/PLC is March 15th.





- iv. Conservation Reserve Program
 - 1. FSA received authorization to accept offers for Continuous Signup 61 starting January 12th. This includes SAFE, HELI, and CREP. Given the 27 million acreage cap from the 2018 Farm Bill, non-CREP offers will be accepted via a batching process to ensure we do not exceed our acreage limit. The first batch will close on March 15th. Conservation Planning will not occur until the County Office has been notified of batch acceptance.
- v. All offers containing re-enrolled acreage must be submitted by July 31st.
- b. CRP
 - i. Continuous sign up
 - ii. Applications received totaling 27M acres, but only 2.3M acres can be eligible (Application period 1/12 - 3/15)
- c. WI Wetland Association
 - i. WI Wetlands Science Conference = Early bird registration ends 1/19/24
- d. Grassworks
 - i. Grassland Conservation Project
 - 1. Developing beginner grazing curriculum to get more grazing farmers, increase training and acreage
 - 2. Adam Abel will be presenting at Grazing conference
- e. Savanna Institute
 - i. Now has 3 Agroforestry Technical Service Providers
 - ii. Expanding agroforestry project
 - 1. <https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-priorities/provide-food-and-water-sustainably/expanding-agroforestry-production/>
- f. WTCAC
 - i. Held board meeting week of 1/8
 - ii. Soil health training coming up in February
- g. WLWCA
 - i. Conference coming in May 2024
 - ii. Needs speakers for the Driftless Area Symposium:
 - 1. [Wisconsin Land and Water | Driftless Area Stream Restoration Symposium \(wisconsinlandwater.org\)](https://www.wisconsinlandwater.org/symposium)
- h. WiWiC
 - i. Events start with Spring Learning Circles, followed by Summer field days and Fall learning circles.
 - ii. There will be a total of 12 events.
 - iii. The Winter webinars are up on our website for January and February.





- iv. The WiWiC Conservation Educator Network meets through online webinars a couple of times a year, and in person in July once we have the Governor declaring the week as the Wisconsin Women in Conservation Week
 - i. Sand County
 - i. Brie (new specialist) in Dodge County
 - ii. Grassland birds are grazing opps focus
 - iii. New RCPP = Farmer led watershed groups
 - j. Pheasants Forever
 - i. Holding precision ag specialist interviews
 - ii. South driftless grasslands focus group – working on getting grant funding
 - k. Ducks Unlimited
 - i. Working on two easement agreements
 - ii. Posting position for grazing specialist in NW WI
10. 2024 State Technical Advisory Committee meetings
- a. Committee agreed on the third Thursday the first month of each quarter (9:30a-12:00p):
 - i. April 18
 - ii. July 18
 - iii. October 17

Action Items		
Task	Assigned to	Due date
Get presenter from Milwaukee Urban Ag Program to attend and present at upcoming meeting	Kaitlin S	2/26/2024
Send event details to Ryan Gerlich	All Partners	Ongoing





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Watershed and Flood Prevention Program

Adam Dowling - Acting State Watershed Planning Specialist
January 18, 2023



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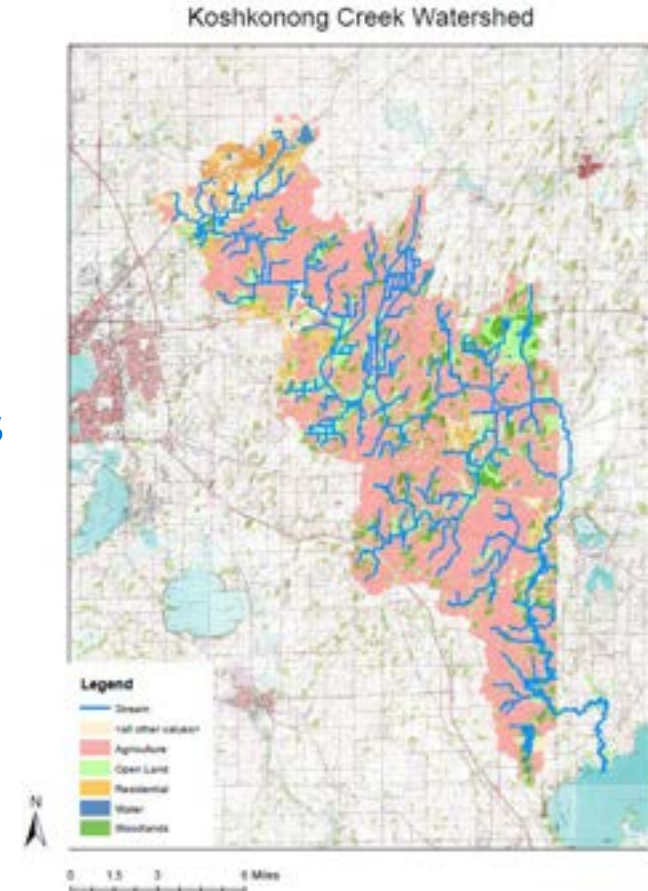
Watershed & Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program Project Updates

- ▶ WFPO includes
 1. Flood Prevention Operations Program (Flood Control Act 1944)
 2. Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954
- ▶ Goal: To provide technical & financial assistance to address resource concerns due to erosion, floodwater, & sediment & to provide for improved utilization of the land and water sources
- ▶ Program Requirements
 1. Watershed is less than 250,000 acres
 2. Watershed must have at least 20 percent agriculture land
 3. Requires a local sponsor to plan and implement the project.



Koshkonong Creek Watershed

- ▶ Securing letters of support from drainage districts
- ▶ Preparing questions for landowner interviews to ascertain issues and interest
- ▶ Group meeting to gauge support for pump stations and drainage water management
- ▶ If feedback is positive, move to Preliminary Investigation Feasibility Report (PIFR) (brief water resources study using existing data and field information to determine the feasibility of developing a project plan)



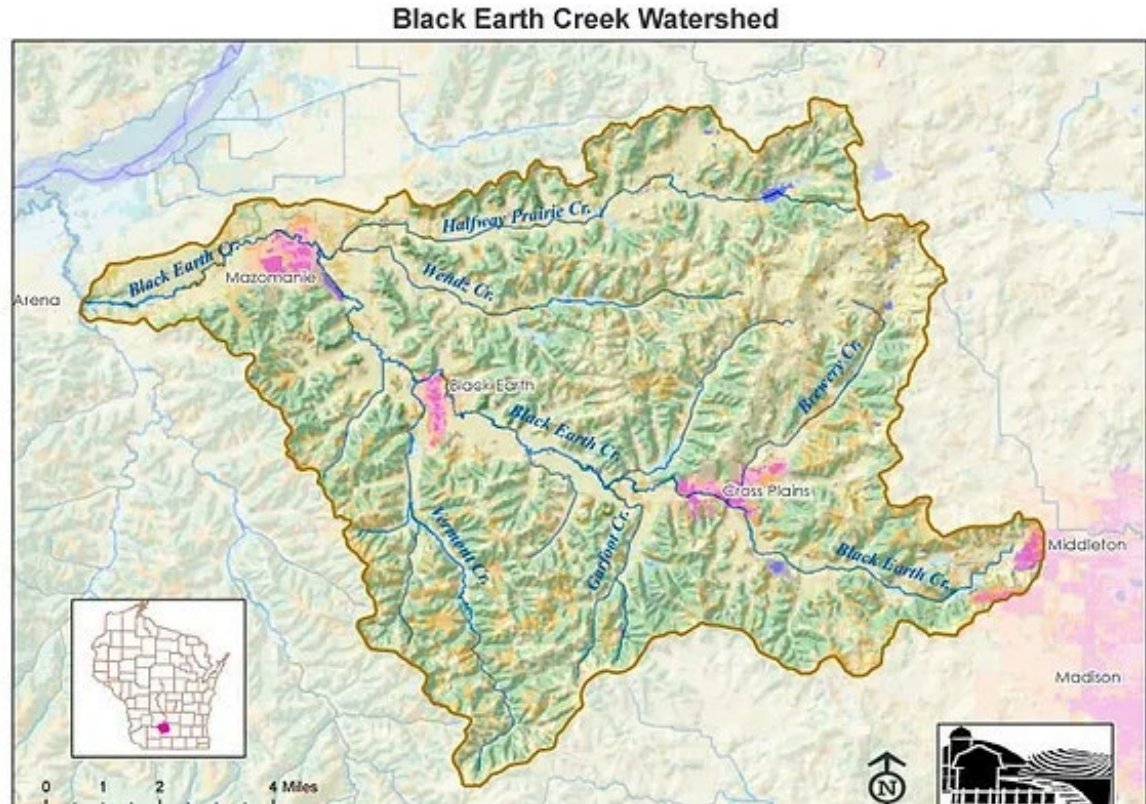
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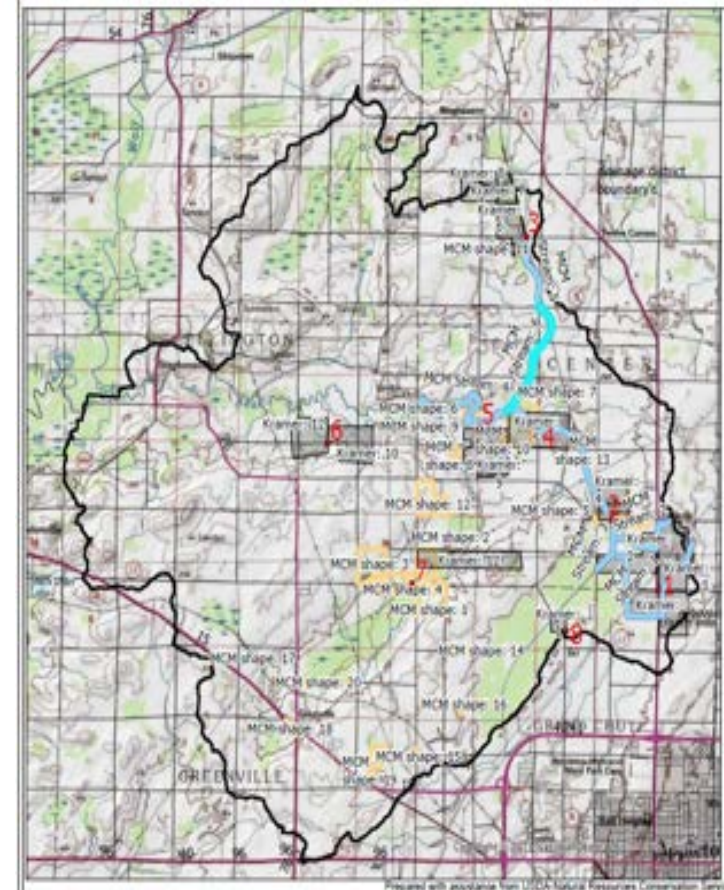
Black Earth Creek Watershed

- ▶ Currently evaluating the feasibility of off-channel storage (OCS) volumes computed by USACE for flood mitigation
- ▶ Once evaluation is complete, meet with Black Earth Creek Steering Committee
- ▶ If OCS is feasible and acceptable, secure letter of support to pursue a PIFR



Bear Creek Watershed

- ▶ Meet with the Outagamie County officials and present the findings of tour, preliminary purpose & need for planning, and potential alternatives.
- ▶ If Sponsor concurs with WFPO Program assistance, assist Sponsors in submitting a formal letter requesting a PIFR.



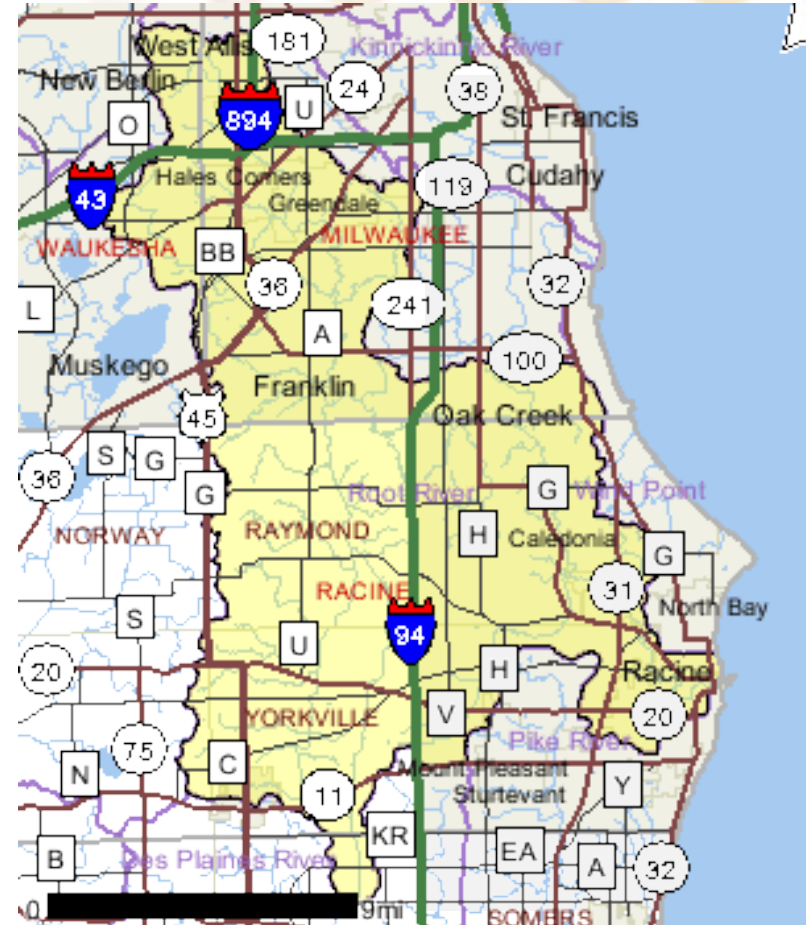
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Root River Watershed

- ▶ Need to schedule meeting to:
 - ▶ Identify issues and resource concerns
 - ▶ Define purposes of WFPO program
 - ▶ Define project area
 - ▶ Develop a central vision to address the problems
 - ▶ Develop Purpose & Need for Planning
 - ▶ Explain need for Statements of Work
 - ▶ Explore potential Opportunities
 - ▶ Explain program Compatibility
 - ▶ Define stakeholders
 - ▶ List cooperating Federal and State Agencies



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Questions?

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Easements Update

1/18/24 | Dave Gundlach – ASTC Easements

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FY24 ACEP Applications



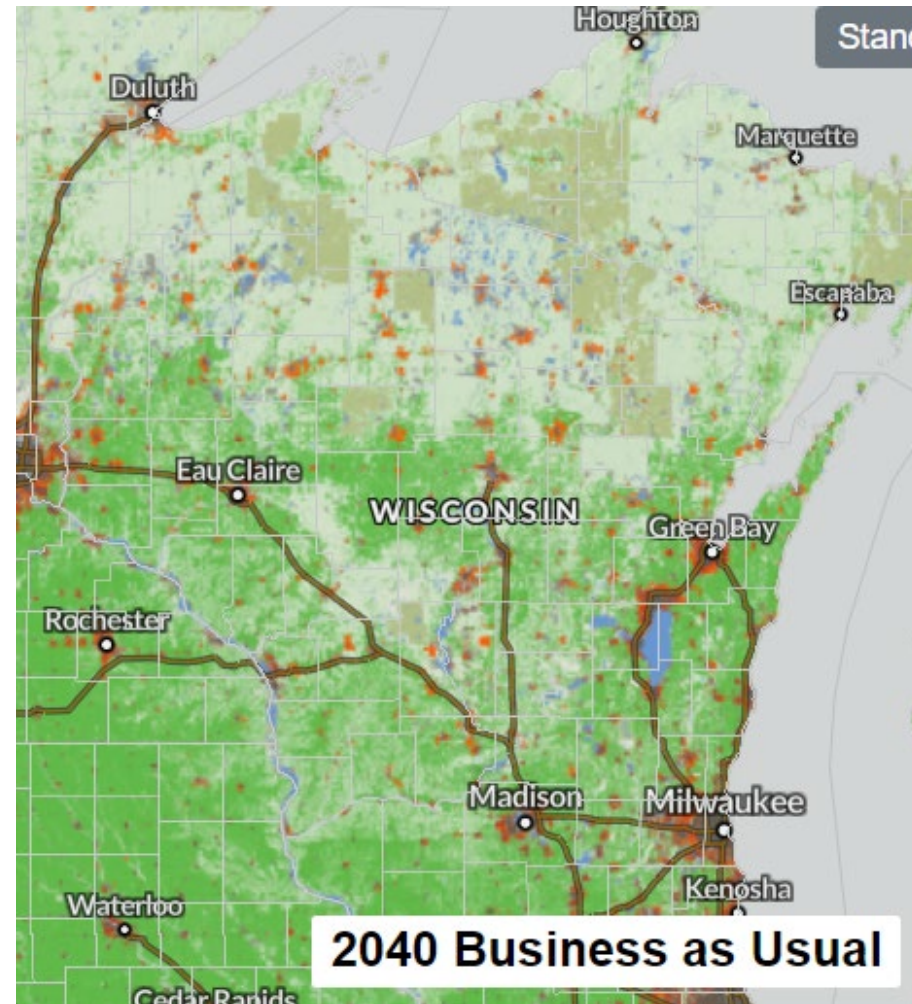
- **IRA ALE**
 - 3 applications ranked
- **IRA WRE**
 - 11 applications ranked
- **General WRE**
 - 9 applications ranked currently
 - Will add any apps not funded thru IRA
- **GLRI WRE**
 - 13 applications ranked
 - \$3.5M available



IRA Funds Targeting

ACEP ALE IRA Target Areas

- Eligible ag lands currently in grassland or native vegetation where NRCS has identified a high threat of conversion to non-grassland use
- Cropland or grassland where NRCS had identified a high threat of conversion to non-agricultural use
- Active agricultural rice cultivation on subsiding highly organic soils



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IRA Funds Targeting



ACEP WRE IRA Target Areas

- **Soils high in organic carbon meeting designated thresholds**
 - Histosols, soils with histic epipedons, aquolls (wet mollisols), and soils with umbric epipedons



IRA Timeline



- **November 13 – National application deadline**
- **December 8 – National ranking deadline in CART**
- **December 22 – NHQ notifies States of selected applications**
- **No word from EPD on announcement**



The Backlog

- **ALE**

- 2021 – 1
- 2022 – 3
- 2023 – 1

- **RCPP ALE**

- MMSD – 5
- AFT – 5



The Backlog



- **2019 WREs**
 - 5 APCEs expiring 2/15/24
 - 2 reviews received from OGC last week
- **2021 WREs**
 - 5 APCEs expiring 2/15/24 – waiting on waivers from EPD
- **2022 WREs**
 - 4 APCEs expiring 2/15/24 – 2 mods signed and submitted
- **2019 FPEs**
 - 4 APCEs expiring in 2024
- **2023 WREs**
 - 9 enrollments being prepped for OGC



Ducks Unlimited RCPP



- **PPA submitted for review 1/11/24* *New record***
 - November 20th start of discussion
 - 1-week delay due to Portal glitch
- **Highly restrictive deed terms**
 - WRE-like
 - US-held easements
- **4 projects specified in proposal and PPA**
 - Potential for a 5th site





grassLAND 2.0
ACADEMY

Alex Steussy-Williams – Co-coordinator of Grassland 2.0 Academy

Adam Abel – NRCS State Grazing Specialist

Today

- Why managed grazing?
- How did the Academy begin?
- What is the Academy?
- What makes the Academy unique?
- Accomplishments

Environmental Impacts: Grazing vs Confinement

- 24% less sediment loss
- 22% less sediment-bound P runoff
- 23% less soluble P runoff
- 27% lower volatilization of ammonia
- 14% lower net emission of greenhouse gases
- 25% smaller carbon footprint

Rotz et al. 2009. Grazing can reduce the environmental impact of dairy production systems. Forage and Grazinglands 10.1094.

Development of the Academy



What is Grassland 2.0 Academy?





Foundations

67 participants

3 sections

- Resource Inventory
- Plant ID
- Infrastructure

13 webinars

12 quizzes
2 field days

1 grazing planning retreat

22 Foundations graduates
enrolled in Four Seasons











Four Seasons

A group of people, including men, women, and children, are gathered in a grassy field. In the foreground, several brown and black cows are visible, some behind a wire fence. In the background, there is a red barn, a silo, and other farm buildings under a blue sky with light clouds. The scene is set in a rural, agricultural environment.

57 participants

19 webinars
16 quizzes
2 field days

- Critical and Sensitive Areas
- Bale Grazing
- Outwintering
- Grassland Ecology
- Shoulder Seasons
- Nutrition







What makes the Academy unique?





“An aspect that made the Academy stand out was the participants and the knowledge that each person brought. This was not just a group of newbies, but rather a mixed bag of people with varying experience levels. I really appreciated the knowledge and perspectives of each participant, and I feel like I learned as much from my peers as I did from the instructors.”

- Lexi Schank
Research Specialist at UW-Madison
Foundations Graduate 2023



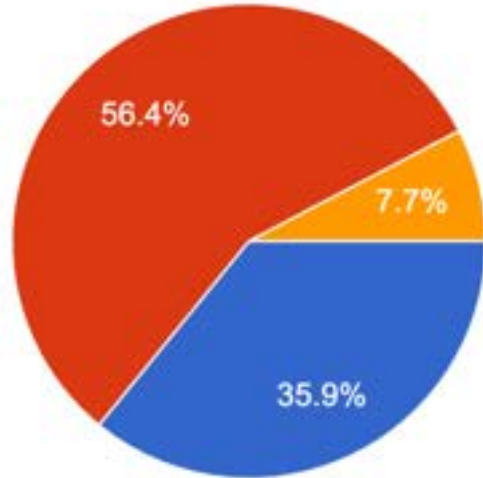






Please select the most true response for you.

39 responses



- I would be willing to invest more time into this course
- The time required of me this summer has been just the right amount
- This course demanded too much of my time



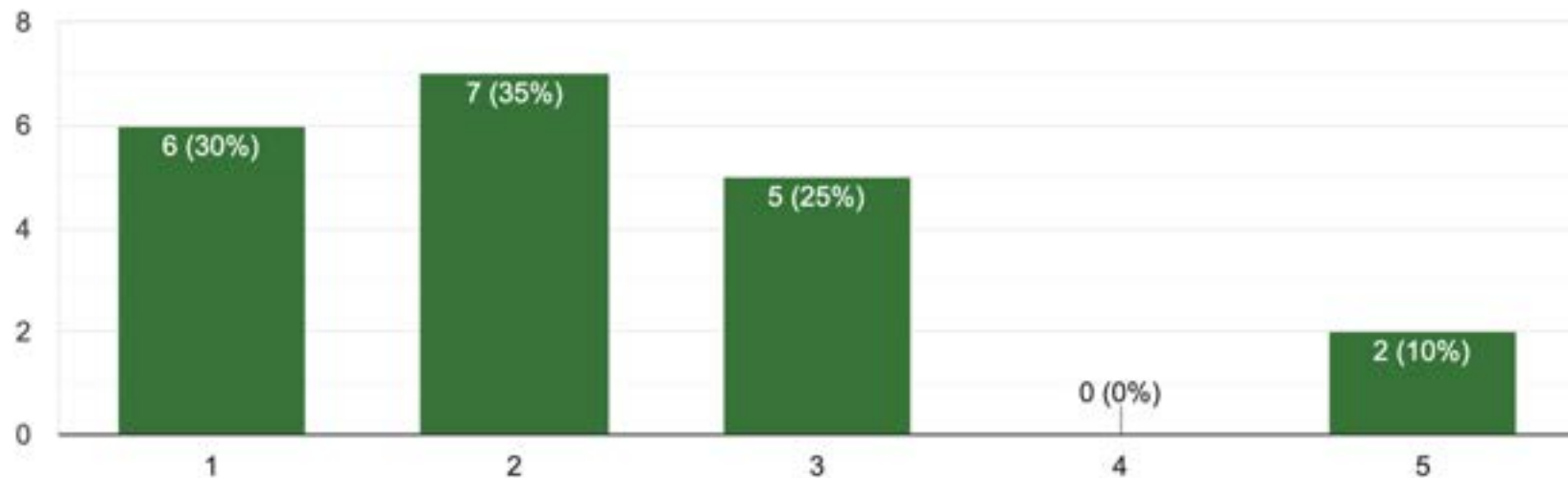


Accomplishments



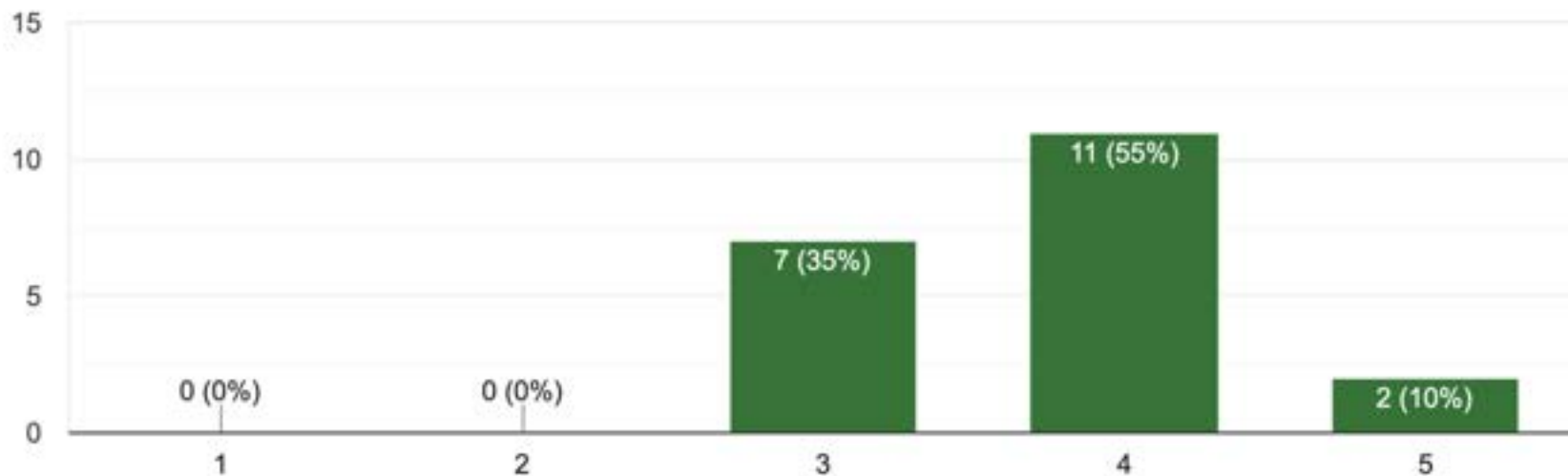
Before you began the Academy, how comfortable were you with writing a grazing plan?

20 responses



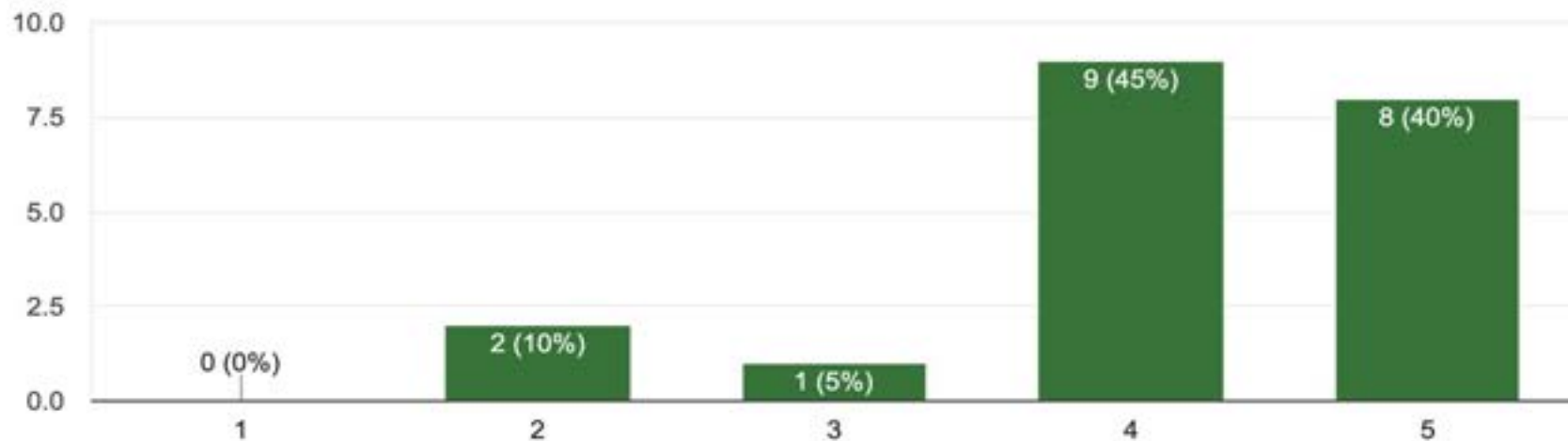
Now that you have completed the Academy, how comfortable are you with writing a grazing plan?

20 responses



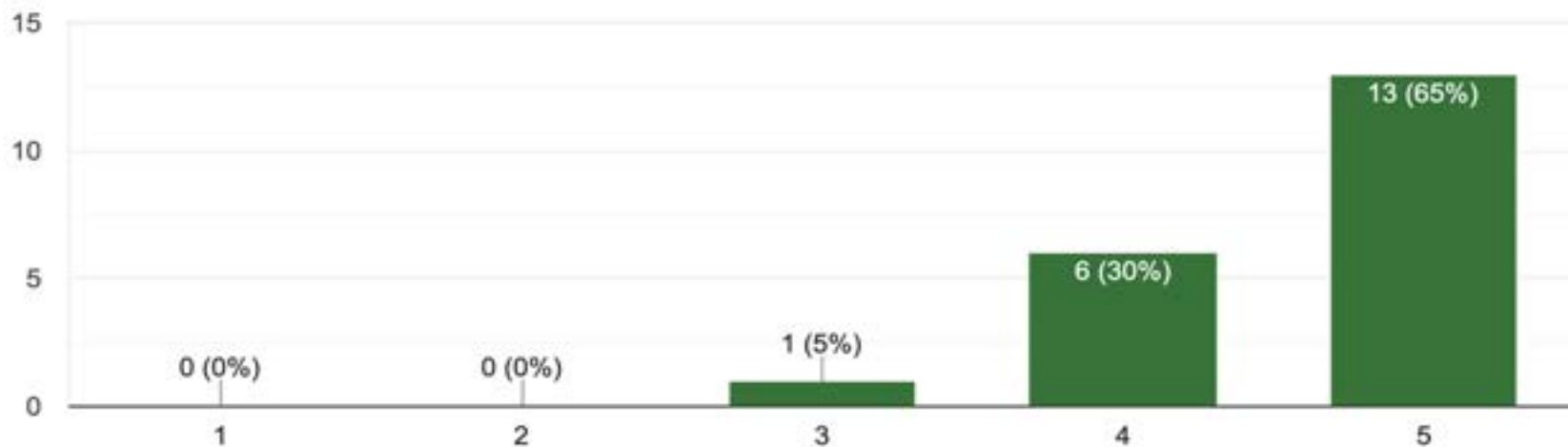
Before you began the Academy, how likely were you to recommend managed grazing to a producer?

20 responses



Now that you have completed the Academy, how likely are you to recommend managed grazing to a producer?

20 responses



“A good educational opportunity such as this has been 30 years in the waiting and finally it's here! My hat goes out to all who worked hard to create this great learning experience that will hopefully usher in the next generation of conservationists.”

- Mary C. Anderson
Wisconsin DNR Conservation Ag and Grassland Specialist
Foundations Graduate 2023







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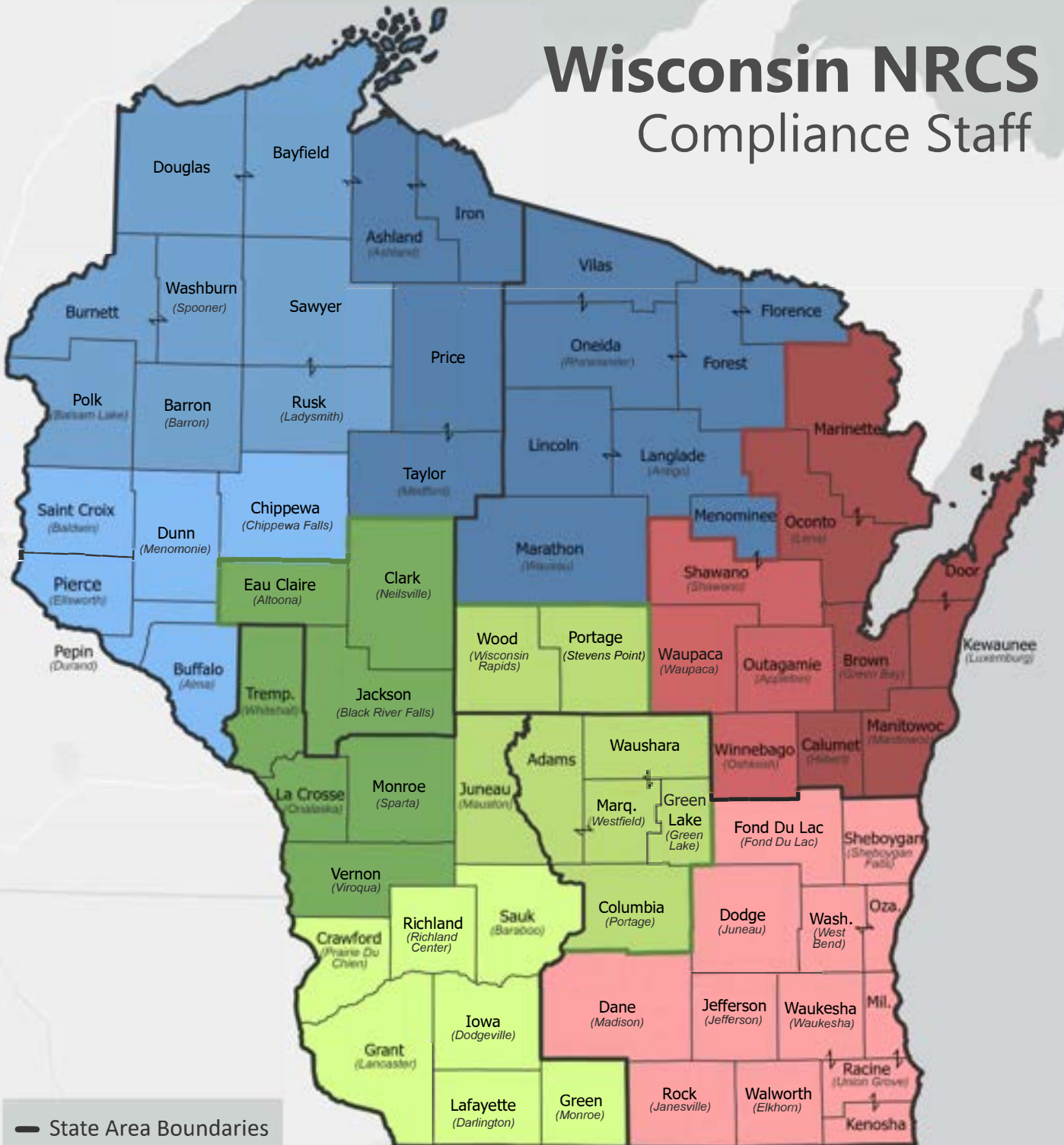
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FY24 Notice of Funding Opportunities

January 18, 2024

Abby Johnson, Management Analyst - Partnerships

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Fiscal Year 2024 Notice of Funding Opportunities – NRCS Wisconsin



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Cooperative Conservation Agreements

- Leverage NRCS & partner resources to build technical capacity, address local natural resource issues, encourage collaboration and develop state- and community-level conservation leadership
- Funding floor/ceiling: \$100,000 - \$2,000,000 per award
- No match requirement
- Expected release: February or March 2024
- NRCS Contact: Ryan Gerlich



Community Agriculture Grants

- Promote conservation practice implementation in urban, suburban, and other small-scale type agricultural operations
- Emphasis on community gardens/community agriculture
- Funding floor/ceiling: \$5,000 - \$250,000 per award
- No match requirement
- Expected release: February 2024
- NRCS Contact: Abby Johnson



Tribal Conservation Grants

- Tribal Food Sovereignty
- Outreach to Tribal Agricultural Producers
- Funding floor/ceiling: \$5,000 - \$250,000 per award
- No match requirement
- Expected release: Spring 2024
- NRCS Contact: Ryan Gerlich





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Abby Johnson, Management Analyst – Partnerships

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Ryan Gerlich, Acting ASTC – Partnerships

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Outreach Update for STAC Meeting

January 18, 2024 – John White, State Outreach Coordinator

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Agenda

FY23 Outreach Summary

- * Events
- * Program Participation
- * New Publications
- * Grants/Agreements
- * Urban/Small-scale ag
- * Other Activities

Moving *Forward* in FY24

- * Priorities and Considerations

Questions



FY23 Outreach Summary



Events:

- 16 Statewide Conferences/Events with NRCS booths
- 190 Outreach events recorded at local/area level
- 72 of these 190 events identified one or more for the following as targeted audience for the events:
 - * Historically Underserved
 - * New Customers
 - * Urban/Small Scale
 - * Veteran producers
 - * Women producers



FY23 Outreach Summary



Program Participation:

23.0% of FY23 contracts were obligated to HU participants
(down 2.0% from FY22) Breakdown:

By Program/Initiative

EQIP – 29.7%
GLRI – 23.9%
CSP – 12.5%
RCPP – 35.3%

By HU Category

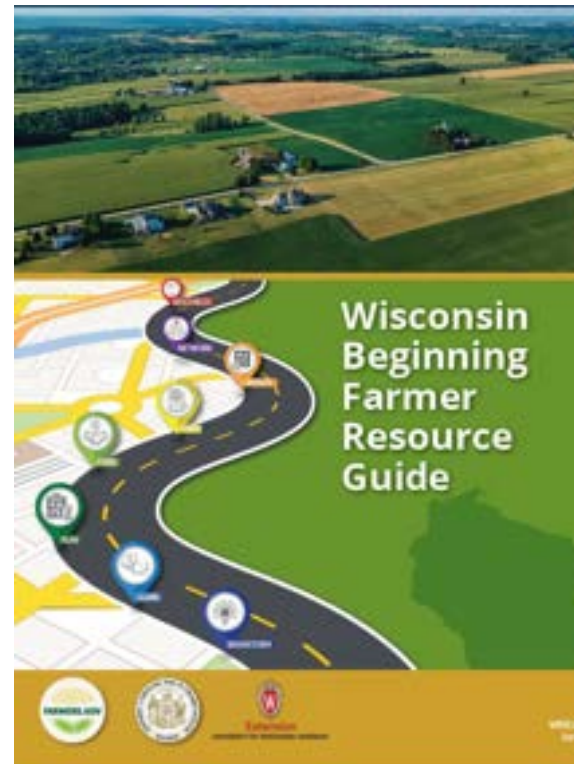
Beginning Farmer – 18.7%
Socially Disadvantaged – 3.2%
Limited Resource – 1.9%
Veteran Farmer – 1.7%



FY23 Outreach Summary

New Publications:

- *Wisconsin Beginning Farmer Resource Guide*
- *Small-Scale & Urban Agricultural Farming in Wisconsin*
- *Navigating Urban Agriculture Programs in Wisconsin (new-FY24)*



FY23 Outreach Summary



Grants/Agreements:

- **WTCAC - New Engagement by American Indian Individuals**
- **WTCAC and WI Wetland Association - Tribal Nation conservation videos**
- **Renewing the Countryside (RTC) – Videos, Webinars, Field Days**
- **Marbleseed – Organic Conservation Specialist (partner affiliate)**
- **Wisconsin Women in Conservation (WiWiC) – Expand areas & increase networking**
- **Community (Ag) Grants – Promote planning/practices in urban/small-scale operations**
 - * **Oneida Nation**
 - * **Mequon Nature Preserve**
 - * **Sauk County**
 - * **Golden Sands RC&D**
 - * **Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin**
 - * **Milwaukee Public Schools**



FY23 Outreach Summary



Urban/Small-scale:

- **Urban Ag Implementation Team (from LDP project recommendations)**
 - * **Urban Ag Teams channel created**
 - * **Urban/Small-Scale Ag in WI factsheets created**
 - * **Urban Ag/Conservation related positions recommended (and filled)**
 - * **Small-Scale & Urban Ag webpage created on NRCS-WI website**
- **Five Urban Ag related positions created and filled**
 - * **2 NRCS (Madison SO and Juneau AO)**
 - * **3 Partner Affiliates w/GS RC&D (Union Grove, Madison, Stevens Point)**
- **Urban Ag and Forestry EQIP fund pool – All apps funded in FY23**
- **Urban and Community Ag Sub-committee (UCAS)**
 - * **Three additional partner organizations had reps join in FY23**



FY23 Outreach Summary



Other Activity:

- Translation of NRCS technical videos (and transcripts) to Hmong
- Training related examples
 - * State Sponsored Civil Rights Compliance in Program Delivery training
 - * NRCS forestry training provided to WTCAC Forestry Subcommittee
 - * USDA training for new RTC Connectors - Go Farm Connect (2501 project)
 - * Urban/Small-scale plug planting for pollinator habitat training
- Staff Participation on Committees/Groups
 - * Farmland Access Hub, New Landowner Advisory Board, WI Land+Water Youth Education Committee
- Quarterly Equity Report (semi-annual for FY24)
- Outreach Database updated



FY24 Outreach - Moving *Forward*

Some Priorities:

- Provide information and discuss outreach strategies with staff
(Lunch & Learns, Area meetings, Webinars)
- Expand NRCS participation in statewide events (22 – 6 more than FY23)
- Continue to emphasize/utilize Limited English Proficiency (LEP) services
- Continue to develop outreach materials relevant to Urban/Small-Scale Ag
- Develop new bannerstands for Urban/Small-Scale Ag field events
- Offer training to support staff in assisting Urban/Small-scale producers
- Develop a resource guide publication for Hmong producers in Wisconsin
- Reschedule the Working Effectively with American Indians course
- Assist partners that received funding in FY23 related to outreach/equity
- Seek new agreement opportunities in FY24 related to outreach/equity





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Questions?

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