

PLANNING FOR EXTREMES

Soil and Water Conservation Society



Great Lakes – Clean Water

SWCS Project Funded By
The Joyce Foundation





www.swcs.org

Project Purpose and Approach

- Purpose
 - Harness USDA conservation programs more effectively to restore Great Lakes Ecosystem.
 - Administrative and legislative reform of USDA conservation programs.
- Approach
 - Tap ideas of people with hands-on experience with USDA conservation programs.
 - SWCS translate ideas into specific recommendations: U.S 2007 farm bill and implementation.
- Challenges created by climate change *were not* the focus of the project.



www.swcs.org

Workshops

- 4 workshops in Great Lakes Basin—May 2006
 - Oshkosh, Wisconsin
 - Grand Rapids, Michigan
 - Saginaw, Michigan
 - Toledo, Ohio
- Participants
 - Hands on experience with USDA programs.
 - NGOs, state/local government, private sector, land grant universities.
- Ideas
 - Make what we have work better.
 - Ideal program.



www.swcs.org

Weaknesses of Status Quo

- Great Lakes a priority?
 - Local priorities dominate; connection to Great Lakes ancillary.
 - Little connection to Areas of Concern.
 - Except for Michigan, Great Lakes basin a small portion of state.
- USDA Programs
 - Implementation diffuse.
 - “Random acts of conservation.”
 - Watershed focus lost or ineffective.
 - Red tape impedes effectiveness.



www.swcs.org

Workshop Themes

- “Great real.”
- “Get on the same page.”
- Institutional reform.
- Innovation.
- Gaps.
- First, do no harm.



www.swcs.org

Get Real

- Great Lakes priority—set goals and drive up into tributary watersheds.
- Targeting, targeting, targeting.
 - Critical watersheds.
 - Critical mass.
 - Right practices, in right place, at right scale.
- More trained people on the ground—technical infrastructure is major limitation.
- Bad actors—more emphasis on regulatory programs.
- Low-hanging fruit—focus on key practices and systems.
- Get serious about monitoring and evaluation.



www.swcs.org

Get on the Same Page

- Too many mixed messages and static in the system among the multitude of local, state, federal, and nongovernmental institutions.
- Common standards and performance indicators.
- Harmonize USDA programs with state and local initiatives.
- USDA coordinator for each Great Lake?

Institutional Reform

- Structure and multiplicity of institutions creates barriers.
 - “Fund projects, not practices.” New funding mechanisms needed to allocate program dollars on a watershed project basis—competitive grants?
 - Organize field staff, technical support around project boundaries.
 - Build local technical and leadership capacity
- Accountability—reward results not paper work.
 - “If its not on paper it didn’t happen.”
 - “Feeding the bulldog.”
- Program consolidation.
 - Relieve technical staff of administrative duties.
 - Acronym creep—more than 20 programs with unique rules, regulations, and administrative procedures.



www.swcs.org

Innovation

- “Get the water right.”
 - Restore and/or repair hydrology in agriculture landscapes.
 - Natural stream channel restoration.
 - “Two-stage” ditches.
 - Controlled drainage in tile drained watersheds.
- Information technology and decision support systems applied to farm/ranch management.
- “Smart” monitoring.

Gaps

- Who is going to get after urban conservation and urban sprawl?
- Realistic incentives/payments in the urban shadow?
- Failing septic systems?
- Preservation and restoration of shoreline habitat?
- What about private forest land?
- Don't forget about ground water—critical contribution to Great Lakes ecosystem.



www.swcs.org

First, Do No Harm

- U.S. crop subsidies get in the way of improving the health of the Great Lakes.
 - Encourage intensive production of row crops.
 - Create barriers to participation in conservation programs.
- Strengthen and enforce cross-compliance provisions.
- Transition to “green payments.”
- But...domestic political will lacking and trade talks in limbo.



www.swcs.org

Next Steps

- SWCS analyzing workshop results—recurring themes and ideas.
- Translate ideas into specific recommendations for administrative and legislative reform.
 - Make what we have work better.
 - 2007 farm bill opportunities.
 - 2007 farm bill implementation.
- Postpone release until after the U.S. mid-term elections—organization of new Congress.
- Primary focus on implementation.
- Reinforce with results of this workshop.



www.swcs.org

Upshot

- Workshop participants identified basic and well understood principles of best management.
- Climate change ramps up sense of urgency, but basic message is the same—another and compelling reason to do what we know we should do.
- “We know how to do this”—institutions and political will is the key factor.
- QUESTION—More of the same, or does climate change require different strategies and approaches to adequately protect watersheds.



The Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) is a nonprofit scientific and educational organization—founded in 1943—that promotes science-based conservation and environmental practice, programs, and policy.

SWCS has over 7,000 members around the world.

Our mission is to foster the science and art of natural resource conservation and environmental management on working land—the land used to produce food, fiber, and other services that improve the quality of life people experience in rural and urban communities.

We pursue our mission through a combination of research, education, and advocacy.

You can learn more about SWCS and our projects by visiting our website: www.swcs.org