

State of the Society Address

July 27, 2008

Welcome SWCS members to the official “delegate” meeting/Town Hall Meeting. I am pleased to see so many of you participating in this event. In my current position I have had opportunity to sit in on several town hall meetings with The Nature Conservancy and found them to be very informative.

Today I am going to provide you with an overview of the State of the Society. I will also give you an extemporaneous update on yesterday’s board meeting and the actions that we are taking to search and hire a new executive director.

Over the next 10 years there will be a leadership crisis. The Leadership Deficit by Bridgespan, a Boston nonprofit firm, predicts that there will be 640,000 vacant senior management positions in the next decade. The nonprofit sector, and I imagine other sectors as well are on the cusp of a leadership crisis. Because we are a very diverse organization, we need leaders from every discipline to continue to foster the art and science of natural resource conservation. We as a Society need to be selecting and honing the next generation of leaders. You may be one of them.

2008 State of Society Address

What is the state of the Society, July 27th, 2008?

To begin with I’d like to share an overview of the industry and show you where SWCS fits in that model.

SWCS is a nonprofit organization. The nonprofit sector faces increasing demands from boards, staff and communities to be more accountable, efficient, and effective. Take a look at these statistics.

Non profits are growing faster than the rest of the economy. That is a huge indicator of the demand that is out there for a cause that is worth pursuing. Nonprofits grew in number from 1.1M to 1.4M. They received \$1T in revenue two years ago. That revenue comes from members, donors or

government. How many of you have been asked to do more with less? The Nonprofit sector is no different. There is competition out there for that revenue. Government cuts can have a huge impact on nonprofits since they are usually the ones picking up the slack where the government services leave off.

The Nonprofit Organization Lifecycle Model shows a typical lifecycle model for a non-profit. Since SWCS has been in existence for 63 years, we have displayed several growth stages. But, let's look at the past 10 years under the leadership of Craig Cox. I would have to say that Craig took over a rocking ship and I would have to put the Society right at the renewal interception of the decline mark when Craig took the helm.

We were a mature organization but we needed to renew and grow to get back to that *sustain* area. We had some financial issues, we had some staffing issues, and we had some infrastructure issues. But Craig is happy to report that he is not leaving a sinking or rocking ship. He is leaving the Society in a better state than when he came.

Financially, we are in very good shape.

Our income level from 2006 to 2007 took a slight dip.

1. Conference fees were higher in FY 07. We took on an additional conference ~ Managing Ag Landscapes.
2. Investment Income declined somewhat. That's dependent on the market and it was down.
3. Publication income is higher in FY 08 because of book sales on our new publication ~ Managing Ag Landscapes. The Environmental Benefits of Conservation on Croplands and The Soil Biology Primer also continues to be big seller. Page charges, reprints and advertising were up \$25,000 in FY 08.

Expenses:

1. Governance payroll increased from our Executive Director spending more time in the governance area verses public affairs. Travel was higher for Board and Online Journal expenses were significant. The Board considered this to be an important update for future of the Society and the needs of our members.

2. Member services expenses increased with the addition of time spent on Corporate recruitment. A new online database was completed in March which included additional staff time and professional support.
3. Publications expenses decreased in 08 because the preparation, layout and design of the Journal was brought in house instead of contracting those services.
4. Special Project money ~ our soft money was less in 08.

All in all the Board feels that we are in great shape and expect to continue to be in great shape into the future. We will be making one change to our 08 financial statement. Our auditors have suggested we revise, due to the revenue we received from a legal settlement claim along with payment of the mediated amount of \$130,000 from flood damage to our headquarters.

The conservation provisions of the US farm bill are vitally important to the members and mission of SWCS. We worked hard to bring science and professional judgment to bear to ensure the farm bill produces programs and policy that work for agricultural producers and deliver the benefits taxpayers expect. We took on this work through a series of workshops, analyses, assessments, testimony, speeches, and other activities designed to inform policy development and program implementation.

Scientists, conservation advisors, and producers recognize the need for a more comprehensive and integrated approach to soil management that (1) considers the multiple production and ecological functions soil provides, (2) evaluates multiple factors of soil degradation, (3) provides standards or thresholds for managing soil to sustain its multiple production and ecological functions, and (4) results in more comprehensive recommendations for soil management and conservation.

The Beyond T project funded by the Wallace Genetic Foundation produced a report from expert consultation that reviewed the strengths and weakness of the Soil Conditioning Index and the Soil Management Assessment Framework and made recommendations for action to develop tools to support a more comprehensive and integrated approach to soil management and (2) provided a review and synthesis of the scientific literature regarding definitions of soil quality, soil functions, soil attributes and indicators, attempts to set threshold levels for indicators, and attempts to construct frameworks for more comprehensive soil management.

SWCS undertook a joint US-Canada project to follow up on the findings of its 2003 report “Climate Change: Soil Erosion and Runoff from Cropland.” The project focused on the Great lakes as a model region of concern to evaluate options for incorporation effects of extreme weather events into conservation planning and pollution prevention efforts. The final report, issued in April of 2007, highlighted differences in planning approaches that current planning for long-term average conditions. For the report, SWCS developed specific recommendations for changes in policy, planning, and practice based on the white papers and workshop deliberations. From the information in the report, I submitted official comments to EPA regarding their National Water Program Draft Climate Change Strategy.

Corporate Membership

The Soil and Water Conservation Society has invited other organizations and industry to join us in our mission to advance soil, water, and related natural resource conservation to achieve sustainability.

We believe that by partnering with other organizations who share our passion, we can work together to practice and promote an ethic that recognizes the interdependence of people and their environment.

We offer the opportunity to increase national and international visibility and identification with land and water conservation causes.

Journal of Soil and Water Conservation

The Journal of Soil and Water Conservation is the society’s flagship publication, with a circulation to over 6,000 individuals and libraries worldwide. The journal serves as an important international multidisciplinary forum to promote creative thinking and investigation of conservation issues.

The Journal has two sections designed to engage a diverse readership: a front A Section containing features, perspectives, and articles on practice, and a Research Section containing peer-reviewed applied research papers.

In the past year, the number and diversity of A Section articles has increased according to goals set in strategic planning. At the same time, the average

page length of A Section articles has decreased which better serves the busy schedule of many conservation professionals and also helps us keep a financially balanced journal.

In 2007, the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation had an increased impact factor and the most citations ever (1,773).

Great excitement is building for the launch of the online journal in mid-September. Keep posted for more information. The SWCS Web site will provide answers to frequently asked questions.

SPECIAL CONFERENCES

With the addition of our relatively new Professional Development Director, Dewayne Johnson, we have additional conferences sponsored by SWCS. They have been well received, well attended and a great source of revenue for the Society. You see here that the Managing Ag Landscapes Conference had 370 attendees. If you compare that with the Annual Conference which always brings in a bigger audience ~ that's excellent attendance.

SWCS is organizing "Farming with Grass: Achieving Sustainable Mixed Agricultural Landscapes," to be held October 20-22, 2008 in Oklahoma City, OK. The focus is on enhancing the multi-functional benefits and sustainability of mixed agricultural systems that dominate many sub-humid to semi-arid grassland eco-regions of the U.S. and other parts of the world. The conference will consist of invited speakers, submitted papers, and facilitated roundtable discussions. The overall goal of the conference is to address agriculture at a crossroads, through the convergence of increased environmental awareness, widespread recognition of human-induced climate change, emerging bio-based energy systems, rural demographics, and commodity prices that are higher than they have been for many decades.

The 2009 Annual Conference will be held July 11-15, 2009 Hyatt Regency Dearborn Dearborn, MI Partners: SWCS Michigan Chapter, CEAP

The 2010 annual conference will be held on July 17-21, 2010 at the Hilton at the Ballpark St. Louis, MO Partners: Show-Me Chapter SWCS

Other meetings in the works:

Aquatics and the Farm Bill – September 2009

Managing Ag Landscapes II – November 2009

CEAP Synthesis Project with Jan Boll – 2010

2011 & 2012 Annual Conference site selection process

Membership

Membership trends have been in decline since 1978. This is not just true of our Professional Society, but true of all Professional Societies.

But let's look at numbers for 2008. From April 2007 to March 2008 we lost 599 members but gained 478 new members. The steady decline seems to have stabilized. The decrease is only at a 3% loss compared to a 5% loss over the past decade. But there is good news on the horizon. In the first quarter of 08, our membership increased by 12 members!

SWCS Website

Have you checked out the new SWCS website? New features include:

- Members only section with:
 - Access to database to update personal information (contact info, interests, etc.)
 - On-line membership renewal
 - SWCS membership directory
 - Chapter officer list and contacts for each chapter
- On-line store to purchase SWCS publications, products and clothing with logos
- On-line versions of SWCS Special Project reports
- Conference Info and Registration

Summary

- The state of the SWCS is sound.
- We face many challenges, particularly with respect to membership and finances.

- These challenges are also opportunities for change and improvement.
- I am confident that our members and staff have the skills and passion to:
 - successfully address our challenges and opportunities,
 - build our membership,
 - develop our professional skills, and
 - be effective advocates of conservation