



# CONSERVOGRAM

The newsletter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society

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## 72nd SWCS International Annual Conference

Monona Terrace Convention Center  
Madison, Wisconsin  
July 30 to August 2, 2017  
[www.swcs.org/17AC](http://www.swcs.org/17AC)

### Why You Don't Want to Miss Out on Visiting Madison, Wisconsin

To say we are excited about the setting for this year's annual conference would be a bit of an understatement. Nestled between Lakes Monona and Mendota, Madison, Wisconsin, is one of only two US cities built on an isthmus, making it one of the most unique settings for the SWCS Conference. The conference facility, Monona Terrace Convention Center, hugs the edge of Lake Monona and offers a breathtaking panoramic view of the sparkling water. Start each morning with our networking coffee hour



State Street in Madison, Wisconsin.

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Join Give Journal



as you watch the sunrise over the lake, and end your day with a walk around the lively Capitol Square. Have we piqued your interest yet? Here are a few more fun facts about the city of Madison:

- Madison’s brand of fresh-air fun doesn’t end with the water. There are more than 200 miles of biking and hiking trails, a BCycle bike share program, and you will even find a bike elevator in the convention center! In addition to bike trails, Madison has over 260 parks where you will find endless possibilities for outdoor recreation.
- *The Wall Street Journal* named Madison in their “Good Eats in the Great States” article, as top when it comes to what’s on the table. As you venture around Capitol Square, we guarantee you will find yourself with no shortage of choices offering local cuisine...that is, if you make it past the delicious-smelling food trucks!
- Add in a splash of environmentalist attitude (after all, Aldo Leopold, Gaylord Nelson, and John Nolen all called Madison their home at one point or another) and you’ll see why it’s no surprise NerdWallet ranked Madison #1 Greenest City in America.

Still wondering if it’s worth your time to visit Madison? Don’t take our word for it. See for yourselves! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lno4cPm61zE>



Skyline from Lake Mendota, Madison, Wisconsin.

## Call for Presentations – Deadline January 9, 2017

The SWCS Call for Presentations is still open, and abstracts are being accepted for oral presentations, posters, symposia, and workshops.

This year’s conference will feature three special interest areas of focus as well as the eight traditional/general topic areas. Special consideration will be given to presentations that cater to the conference theme.

Detailed information regarding the Call for Presentations may be found at [www.swcs.org/17ac](http://www.swcs.org/17ac).

## SWCS Annual Giving Campaign

As 2016 comes to an end, please consider donating to the Society’s Annual Giving Campaign.



**“I give because I want to make a difference. If I’m not involved then I’m saying that status quo is okay.”**  
 – Susan Meadows, Soil and Water Conservation Society member

That’s Susan’s story, what’s yours?

We ask for YOUR help as we end 2016. Be a part of the story, “Healthy Land, Clean Water, For Life,” and make a tax-deductible donation to the Soil and Water Conservation Society.

There are many ways to give:

### GIVE ONLINE

[www.swcs.org/give](http://www.swcs.org/give)

In addition to a one-time gift, you can choose to spread out your gift over 12 months by selecting the monthly giving option.

### MAIL

Soil and Water Conservation Society  
 945 SW Ankeny Road  
 Ankeny, IA, 50023

### CALL

1-515-289-2331 ext. 118

### SHOW SOME LOVE – Combined Federal Campaign

Are you a federal employee? Then “Show Some Love” and participate in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC)! SWCS Charity Code: 11797.



### \*NEW FOR 2016\*

The holiday shopping season is here; how great would it be to know you’re gifting both the Society and your loved ones by shopping online? Go to [smile.amazon.org](http://smile.amazon.org) and select “Soil and Water Conservation Society, Ankeny, IA” as your charity. Amazon gives the Society 0.5% of the price of eligible AmazonSmile purchases. Bookmark [smile.amazon.org](http://smile.amazon.org) and make sure to use it every time you shop!



**BE A PART OF THE  
 STORY**

**Healthy Land  
 Clean Water  
 For Life**



## Chapter Spotlight: Michigan Chapter

**Chapter location:** Michigan

**Current chapter president:** Jon Bartholic

### History of the chapter:

- 1947: On December 3, 1947, the Soil Conservation Society of America (SCSA) Council approved establishment of the Michigan State Chapter, Charter No. 24, at a meeting in Omaha, Nebraska.
- 1948: On Saturday, July 10, 1948, a meeting of all SCSA members in Michigan was called to establish and organize the Michigan State Chapter. There were 67 members.
- 1950: The SCSA held its International Annual Conference at the Statler Hotel in Detroit. The meeting (October 26, 27, and 28) was hosted by the Michigan Chapter.
- 1949: Membership on December 31, 1960, was 249 (17th in the nation).
- 1968: At the beginning of the year, the Chapter had 252 members.
- 1974: There were 239 members at the beginning of 1974.
- 1985: During the year, the Chapter grew from 199 members to 235 members. This was the largest chapter growth recorded by the Society in either number of new members (36) or percentage growth (18%) during 1985. The Chapter hosted the SCSA Annual International Conference in Dearborn.
- 2009: The Chapter hosted the SWCS Annual International Conference, again in Dearborn.
- 2016: The Chapter's current membership is 66, one fewer than when the Chapter was organized in 1948.

**Please describe your most successful chapter event in the last year. What did members gain from this experience?** The Chapter's Annual Seminar was held during Michigan State University's Agriculture and Natural Resources Week. The Seminar title was A Matter of Balance: Systems Approaches to Managing Great Lakes Landscapes. Registrants included 23 Chapter members, 37 nonmembers, 9 students, and 5 guests. Speakers were a professor from the University of Waterloo, Ontario; a hydrologist from the National Weather Service; the Water Resources Investigations Science Chief from the United States Geological Survey; a local farmer; and a professional engineer from a consulting firm.

The general description was *"A major challenge in managing agricultural and urban landscapes is in providing healthy and nutrient-rich soil for plant growth with minimal loss of crop nutrients to the environment. In general, farms and urban areas in the Great Lakes Region are not losing much nitrogen and phosphorus on a per acre basis, but the watersheds are large and freshwater is sensitive to even small increases in nutrient concentration.*

*Because nutrient loss is greatly influenced by the timing and intensity of rainfall, the solution to the problem of nutrient loss and subsequent degradation of lakes and streams is neither simple nor obvious. This seminar will bring together researchers, agri-business professionals, livestock farmers, and urban hydrologists in a holistic approach to managing a verdant landscape while protecting our water resources."*

Participants gained knowledge on research and development efforts focused on nutrient transport and on-farm practice implementation efforts.

**What other activities has your chapter been involved in this year?** We awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to a Western Michigan University student. We presented a Conservationist of the Year Award to a USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) district conservationist. We also presented a workshop titled Technological and Innovative Selection of Conservation Practices featuring online tools in conservation developed by the Institute of Water Research, Michigan State University, in partnership with USDA NRCS.

**What is your membership's preferred method of communication?** Newsletters, email, [website](#), and Facebook.

**What would you say are the most important current conservation concerns for your region?** In our 2016 ANR Seminar Survey, the topics of interest included soil erosion on agricultural land, soil health, cover crops, and drainage management. Also, Great Lakes water quality issues, especially the Western Lake Erie Basin, due to excessive phosphorus.

**Is there any other information you'd like to share about your chapter?** We are currently applying for incorporated nonprofit organization status in the State of Michigan. The Chapter was incorporated in 1985, but stopped sending annual reports in 1994 and let the incorporation status expire in 1997.

The Chapter is working to get part of their scholarship funds invested in mutual funds and CDs. We have a goal to provide a scholarship each year, and this investment should help support that goal. The investment firm required that the Chapter be incorporated before they would set up the mutual funds.

During the past two years we've had to rely on donations to support a scholarship offering each year. The scholarship program was originally initiated in 1980 with funds made available from the 1980 SCSA Annual International Conference held in Dearborn, Michigan, and by a substantial donation from one of our Chapter members.

**For more information about the Michigan Chapter,** contact Daniel F. Kesselring at [dfbjkring@att.net](mailto:dfbjkring@att.net) or visit [www.miglswcs.org](http://www.miglswcs.org).

## New Members

Welcome members who joined in November!

### International

Swagatika Bal  
Balazs Madarasz  
Patrick Slack

### Alabama

Chris Mead  
Addie Reese

### Canada—Ontario

Jim Boak

### Connecticut—University of Connecticut

#### Student Chapter

Brendan Santa Maria

### Iowa

Jeff Tisl

### Illinois

Katie Williams

### Indiana—Purdue University Student Chapter

Amanda Locker

### Massachusetts—University of Massachusetts-

#### Amherst Student Chapter

Isaiah Cherkas

### Oregon

Andrew Donaldson

### Texas—North Texas

Delaina Pearson

## Corporate Members

Please contact [corporate.info@swcs.org](mailto:corporate.info@swcs.org) for more details.

### Gold



### Silver



### Bronze



## From the Leadership: Finding the Win-Win in Revamping Federal Hiring Practices

By Colby Moorberg

*Colby Moorberg is an assistant professor of soil science in the Kansas State University Department of Agronomy. He teaches soils, soil and water conservation, and other soil science courses in addition to serving as a faculty advisor and conducting research. He is a former member of the SWCS Board of Directors and currently serves as the chair of the SWCS Professional Development Committee.*



As a faculty advisor to students in agronomy, soils, and environmental science, one of the most rewarding parts of my job is seeing students excited to begin their first job out of college. In the agronomy profession recent graduates have been blessed with a sustained job market, which has alleviated some job search-related stress. However, for students

who wish to follow a career path into conservation of soil, water, and other natural resources, the hiring process is far more cumbersome and uncertain than necessary.

Currently, hiring practices for positions in federal agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have resulted in a lose-lose situation for both the agency and for the students wishing to pursue careers in conservation through civil service. The problems are numerous and begin with the recruitment process itself. For students graduating in the spring, the best students usually have been offered and have accepted positions around February of their senior year. However, federal agencies competing for these same students rarely take student schedules into consideration, greatly shrinking the pool of well-qualified candidates to recruit. Once a position is listed on usajobs.gov, oftentimes it will be listed for less than two weeks, and in extreme cases, only for one day! Should a student be lucky enough to find a job listing that interests them, there are no knowledgeable technical staff available to answer questions regarding details of the position, such as how much time they will spend in the field or office, what the primary job duties will be, how much travel will be involved, etc. Once a candidate does apply, they encounter a lack of consistency regarding general schedule (GS) classifications, with two seemingly identical positions being listed at two different classifications. They also encounter qualification questions that may or may not

be relevant to the position, and there is no mechanism for follow-up to determine if candidates were truthful in their answer. Once an application is submitted, results or feedback related to the application is slow-to-come with little guidance, if any, from informed staff. To make things worse for government agencies wishing to hire the best graduates, the current and increasing shortage of college graduates in agricultural sciences and engineering, combined with increasing competition from industry, has driven starting salaries higher and higher.

All of the issues described above, combined with the drastic difference in hiring procedures between federal agencies and industry, have resulted in decreased competitiveness of government agencies for top-notch talent. As a result, the best and brightest students are forgoing conservation-focused careers in the public sector, and are instead pursuing careers in industry. Further, under current hiring practices, federal agencies are left with small, potentially underqualified pools of candidates from which non-technical staff are making hiring decisions for technical positions. This is the definition of a lose-lose scenario for both the candidates and the federal agencies wishing to hire them.

I encourage government agencies, particularly those related to soil and water conservation, to reevaluate and revamp their hiring practices. The win-win scenario for the agencies and the candidates starts with modeling their hiring practices after that of industry. This can be done by (1) increasing involvement of technical staff in the hiring process, (2) allowing immediate supervisors to make final hiring decisions, (3) increasing job posting windows to at least one month (and longer if possible), (4) improving user-friendliness of the application and hiring process, and (5) recruiting students on the same hiring schedule as all other potential employers. These changes will facilitate the hiring of the most qualified students to most effectively carry out the missions of government agencies—a win-win scenario for both the agencies and the candidates.

If you're reading this as a student who would like to become a civil servant in the soil and water conservation field, then I have a two suggestions. First, be aware that the current federal hiring process is very different from that of industry; however, if that is your goal, have patience. Also, do everything in your power to get your foot in the door early, such as volunteering with your local soil and water conservation district or getting a position as a student trainee with the NRCS.