September 2026

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION SOCIETY

2026 SWCS EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAM
POST-PROGRAM REPORT

2026 PARTICIPANT DATA

195 Participants

160 Graduates

118 Conservation Event Planner Certifications

123 ELP Events Held

6,062 **(+10,000 at a single event)** Total Event Attendees

1,457 Farmer/ Producer/ Landowner Event Attendees

37 States/US Territories

6 Countries

246 Partner Organizations

OVERVIEW

The 2026 class of the Soil and Water Conservation Society's (SWCS) Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) closed out the year with outstanding results! We saw the creativity, perseverance, and leadership commitment of these early-career professionals firsthand, and we're proud to celebrate their achievements. Navigating a year of professional transitions and change, this cohort brought energy and drive, making an impact not only within the program, but across their communities and the broader Society.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

95% Reported that the program met or exceeded expectations.

95% Rated the program as good or excellent.

89% Indicated the program better prepared them to navigate their role and responsibilities.

TOP SKILLS LEARNED

1. Event Planning
2. Leading Myself
3. Developing Confidence
4. Addressing Barriers to Leadership
5. Community Building

All data from participant-submitted post-program questionnaires and post event recaps.



EMERGING LEADERS IN SWCS LEADERSHIP

These graduates, together with the 2024 and 2025 cohorts, now serve as chapter leaders, committee members, conference planners, and even representatives on the SWCS Board of Directors. Their involvement brings new ideas, energy, and viewpoints to the Society's leadership, helping shape the future of conservation at both the local and national levels.

EMERGING LEADERS ALUMNI NETWORK

The Emerging Leaders Program's impact doesn't stop at graduation. With three cohorts of participants now connected, the ELP Alumni Network keeps growing. Alumni mentor new participants, share their expertise through Society programs, and contribute articles, presentations, and outreach that carry the program's impact even further.

Beyond offering professional support and collaboration, the Alumni Network has become a lasting community for conservation leaders across disciplines and regions. Its continued growth will remain a powerful force for advancing conservation and strengthening SWCS for years to come.

100%

of program participants who attended the conference would recommend it to future participants!

BY THE NUMBERS

- **33** have joined local chapters' leadership or started/restarted a chapter
- **6** served/are serving as SWCS Board of Directors *Ex Officio* members
- **7** served/are serving on SWCS committees
- **77** have volunteered to help plan the International Annual Conference, with **81** participants/alumni attending the 2026 event
- **8** have returned to host ELP modules/networking sessions
- **4** were selected to receive the ELP Alumni Award
- **89** have served as speakers or panelists at SWCS events/webinars

"The program opened my eyes to how important this work is and that there is a dedicated community of professionals in various industries. Even though the headlines aren't always positive, being able to work together with other dedicated professionals boosts morale and allows us to make a positive impact even if it's small."

Christopher Pinkos, 2026 ELP Graduate

EVENTS HIGHLIGHT



Using Plants to Protect Our Water Workshop

hosted by Alyssa Barroso
Coventry, Connecticut



Slice of Summer

hosted by Claire Hambrick
Los Angeles, California



Outside Days Festival

A partnership between
Scraps LLC and Cassidy Winn
Denver, Colorado



Spring Tree Identification Hike

hosted by Brett Ramer
Woodstock, Virginia