

CONSERVOGRAM

 > The newsletter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society

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Emerging Leaders Program Update

The inaugural [2023-2024 Emerging Leaders Program](#) is off to a running start! Learn more about what our 128 participants are doing to grow their professional skill sets and how you can get involved through our [January Update](#).

This program is a response to the critical industry need for skilled leaders equipped to tackle evolving challenges. It intends to tackle various workforce concerns, including:

- mitigating high employee turnover rates;
- bridging the transition into a career after academic pursuits; and
- addressing imminent workforce vacancies due to retiring professionals and new positions created by increased funding

SWCS believes that the future of leadership in our field begins with locally empowered initiatives that embrace inclusivity. We need your help to be that local arm of the program! Do you need help planning an event? Submit ideas and event plans at https://swcs.formstack.com/forms/23_elp_es. Want to serve as a mentor? Use the form to sign up!

Chapter leaders are also invited to attend the second virtual training module on January 25 (1-4 p.m. CT) to network with the participants, receive event planning tools, and obtain community-building support. Contact renee.bouldin@swcs.org for more information.



Message from the Leadership: SWCS Chair Rebecca Power



The first time I fell in love with a place was on a weathered wooden pier overlooking a small cattail-rimmed pond. The pond was behind my best friend Joanna's house. Not in the back forty exactly (they only had six acres), but far enough from civilization to smell only green and the moist ground exhaling around me. I would lie belly down on the pier, watching the water striders, water boatmen, and

dragonfly nymphs that had crawled onto the cattails to transform. Eventually, bluegills would come close enough for me to see their fins and tails swirling, holding their bodies in place as they scanned the water for lunch.

It turns out Joanna's pond also offered one of my first ecology lessons. Occasionally, her dad would let us try our hand at fishing. Joanna's cat would join us on the pier, staring intently into the water as the bluegills swirled gently below. They were small, so when we caught one, we'd usually throw it back.

Every so often, one would swallow the hook, and we knew it would not live. This, of course, was what the cat was waiting for. Joanna tossed the fish on the grass, and the cat immediately pounced. It was quick and jarring compared to watching the grace and precision of the fish in the water.

I was experiencing "nature red in tooth and claw," in the words of poet Alfred Tennyson. The idea that nature is purely and unsparingly about competition and survival of the fittest. Competition as a driving force in ecology and evolution was the dominant paradigm when I was growing up. Competition was the lens that many conservation researchers and practitioners looked through when describing nature and nature-human relationships. And while competition is important, it is only one tool in the toolbox of life.

Now, thankfully, conservation professionals are seeing through a broader array of lenses. We are uplifting stories of mutualism in ecology and the human world—when the benefits of collaboration accrue for all parties in a relationship. While bluegills benefit from plants as food and cover from predators, bluegills also benefit plants by providing nutrients in more usable forms. In other ecosystems, trees provide sugars to fungi, and fungi make it easier for trees to access nutrients and water. Anemones shelter clownfish, and in return, clownfish provide anemones

with nutrients and freedom from troublesome parasites. Agriculture is essentially a mutually beneficial collaboration among people and domesticated plants and animals, with people providing the right conditions for growth and plants and animals providing food, fiber, and fuel.

Mutualism and collaboration are the focus of SWCS's work this year through our inaugural Emerging Leaders Program and our 79th Annual Conference. The [Emerging Leaders Program](#) is designed to help early career conservation leaders develop new skills and learn from one another and the experience of seasoned conservation professionals.

The theme of the [79th SWCS International Annual Conference](#) is Rising Together, Collaborative Conservation for All. Please join us July 21-24 in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, to share successes and embrace lessons learned so that we accelerate progress toward conservation goals with a greater sense of camaraderie and confidence. Consider submitting an oral presentation, poster, symposium, professional development session, and/or workshop that will showcase your contributions to conservation and benefit your colleagues. Submissions are due January 31.

Look forward to seeing you on the beach!

New Issue of the Journal



The January/February issue of the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* can now be found online and will be delivered to mailboxes soon. In this issue, A Section articles include an analysis of how low-cost changes can be implemented to improve the contribution of the [Payment for Ecosystem Services Program](#) in Costa Rica, as well as a perspective on how taking a [comprehensive approach to conservation](#) that goes beyond technical solutions is imperative for safeguarding the well-being of both humans and nature. The Research Section includes an article that presents a suggested means by which conservation practices related to nutrient reduction can be assessed as a single, combinative measure ([Shaffer-Morrison and Wilson](#)); an exploration of barriers and opportunities for innovative conservation program designs ([Houser et al.](#)); and a study on the integration of native prairie vegetative strips into row crop agriculture as a promising conservation strategy in Iowa ([Henning et al.](#)). Find these articles and more in the [online journal](#) today!

2023: A Year in Review

2023 was the year of “firsts” for the Soil and Water Conservation Society. We kicked off several new programs and initiatives and continued improving and expanding our current work. Here are a few highlights from headquarters:

1. NEW! Emerging Leaders Program

SWCS kick-started the inaugural 2023-2024 SWCS [Emerging Leaders Program](#) with **128** conservation professionals across over **9** sectors and **36** states/provinces/territories.

2. Journal of Soil and Water Conservation



[Dr. J. Gordon Arbuckle Jr.](#) was appointed as the first social scientist to serve as Research Co-Editor of the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*.

3. NEW! Conservation Professionals Week

SWCS hosted the inaugural [Conservation Professionals Week](#) to celebrate and lift up the amazing work conservationists do every day to make our world a better place.

4. 78th SWCS International Annual Conference

The [2023 Annual Conference](#) brought together **720** conservationists representing **5** countries and **47** states, the highest attendance in at least 10 years!

5. Webinars

We hosted or co-hosted a grand total of **38 webinars**, including several new series.

6. TWO Interns

For the first time, SWCS had two interns in the headquarters office for the summer, supporting staff as we prepared for the Annual Conference.



Sarah Wright



Benny Loyd

7. SWCS CEO in Washington, DC

Clare spent eight weeks in DC, meeting with national organizations, legislatures, representatives, and partners to advocate for conservation professionals and spread the word about their crucial role in advancing conservation.



8. NEW! Student T-shirt Contest

SWCS hosted our very first [Student T-shirt Contest](#), challenging students to design a t-shirt that represents conservation. Then, we put the top designs on social media for you to decide the winner!



9. NEW! Board Member



We welcomed [Leonard Jordan](#), former USDA NRCS Chief, as the At-Large Director of the SWCS Board of Directors.

10. NEW! SWCS Student Chapter and Affiliate Organization Guide

SWCS launched a [brand new guide](#) to assist students and advisors in starting a student organization at their university, and established an affiliation option, allowing environmental clubs to affiliate with SWCS and access our network and resources.

11. Special Projects

SWCS strives to get involved in projects that help conservation professionals overcome barriers. In 2023, we had several [projects](#):

Wrapped Up:

1. Advancing Precision Nutrient and Soil Health Management with Retailer Cooperatives
2. Conservation Technology: Identifying, reviewing, and adopting solutions to increase efficiency and impact of technology adoption and create user-friendly processes

Ongoing:

1. A Conservation Professionals' Guide to Diversity, Equitable and Inclusive Conservation Delivery Among the Historically Underserved
2. Leading on the Edge: Building Capacity to Scale Edge of Field Practice Implementation
3. Equipping Conservation Professionals and Farmers with Tools to Deliver Edge of Field Practices at Scale for Nutrient Reduction in the Upper Mississippi River Basin
4. Conservation at the Co-op

79th SWCS International Annual Conference Update



Submit a Presentation by January 31

SWCS invites the submission of oral presentations, posters, symposia, and workshops for the 79th SWCS International Annual Conference in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, July 21-24, 2024.

The submission deadline is January 31, 2024. Download the [Call for Presentations](#) for more information. Visit www.swcs.org/24AC for additional information on this year's event.

[View Exhibitor and Sponsor Opportunities](#)

Submit Your SWCS Award Nomination or Scholarship Application

SWCS presents awards and scholarships annually to individuals and organizations who have made outstanding contributions in advocating and advancing the conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources. All winners will be showcased during the awards luncheon at the [79th SWCS International Annual Conference](#) on July 23, 2024, in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

View the 2024 SWCS award and scholarship opportunities at <http://www.swcs.org/awards> and submit your nomination or application by **March 27, 2024**.



Chapter Reports and Awards Released

The annual [Chapter Activity Report](#) is available for our leaders to complete with updates and information on their year's work in 2023. The information provided is used to submit charitable applications and will be used by the national organization to ensure we are providing chapters with the best support possible. This report is combined with the chapter awards nomination form, allowing chapters to easily apply for two annual awards when filling out the report. Information regarding Chapter Activity Reports has been sent to chapter leaders.

All reports are to be submitted through the online form by **February 28, 2024**. Please contact memberservices@swcs.org with any questions.

Thank You

We would like to say a huge THANK YOU to everyone who gave a donation to SWCS! With your contributions, SWCS will continue to be a voice for the conservation professionals protecting and restoring life-giving resources for generations to come.

Upcoming Events

[Winter 2024 SWCS Arizona Chapter Meeting](#)

Sacaton, Arizona
January 19, 2024

[Professional Development Webinar Series Session #7: Combatting Imposter Syndrome](#)

Virtual Event
January 24, 2024 (5 p.m. EST)

[Emerging Leaders Program Module 2 Webinar](#)

Virtual Event
January 25, 2024 (1 p.m. CT)

[Virtual New Member Welcome](#)

Virtual Event
February 7, 2024 (12 p.m. CT)

[Southern New England Chapter Annual Winter Conference](#)

Warwick, Rhode Island
February 16, 2024

New Members

Welcome members who joined in December!

Connecticut/Massachusetts/Rhode Island—Southern New England Chapter

Jamie Clintsman

Iowa

Walter Woolfolk

Michigan

Alexa Hempel

Missouri—Show-Me Chapter

Debbie Harris

North Carolina—North Carolina State University Student Chapter

Megan Gentry

New Mexico

Prakriti Bista

Ohio

Patti Donnellan

SWCS

Emma Harper

Corporate Partners

Please visit www.swcs.org/corporatepartner for more information on how to become a corporate partner.

Platinum



Gold



Silver

We are actively looking for a Silver Level sponsor. If you are interested in sponsoring, please contact memberservices@swcs.org.

Bronze

