



SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION SOCIETY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

2024

2027



Soil and Water Conservation Society Strategic Framework: 2024-2027

This document was developed in collaboration with SWCS staff and Board of Directors utilizing input from members and stakeholders to serve as the organization's guidepost for the next three years.

Outlined in this framework are the outputs and outcomes we strive to achieve to make an impact in conservation through the conservation professionals we serve, represent, and foster. It directs our efforts toward projects with the most significant impact, drawing from our past successes, lessons learned, and the ever-changing landscape of the conservation industry.

We extend our gratitude to everyone who contributed ideas, offered feedback, and provided guidance in the development of this framework. We also appreciate those who continue to collaborate with us in advancing the conservation profession.

Photos courtesy of Lynn Betts (page 2), SWCS staff (pages 3, 4, and 8), SWCS Iowa Chapter (page 5), and Grand Valley State University Chapter (page 8).

Conservation is NOW

Challenges in soil and water conservation are not new. Since the mechanization of agriculture in the early 1900s, the United States has faced high erosion rates, biodiversity loss, and increasingly poor water quality. In the last few decades, these issues have been extrapolated by a changing climate with extreme weather events, the ever-present need to continue to increase agricultural productivity to feed the growing human population, and an increased dependence on inputs due to declining soil health.

Our natural resources play a vital role in the success and happiness of our communities for generations to come. It would be enough to say that we depend on these resources to satisfy our basic needs to eat and drink, but they have a much greater effect on our broader society. Our economy, health and sanitation, workforce, infrastructure, and recreation opportunities also depend on the longevity and health of our soil and water resources. With increasing freshwater shortages globally and declining topsoil, we have reached a pivotal point where we must take urgent action to protect our world's natural resources.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in companies, organizations, agencies, and institutions involved in conservation agriculture. Conservation agriculture works to protect and improve our soil and water resources to create productive and sustainable ecosystems. It also encompasses land and water management practices, including precision agriculture, nutrient management, in-field and edge-of-field practices, prairie restoration, and more. These practices can turn the tide in conservation and make a significant impact, but it takes conservation professionals to connect people to the practices and assistance needed to get it done.

Conservation professionals are THE delivery system for natural resource conservation across the nation. Conservation professionals are the on-the-ground, frontline workers who work tirelessly to ensure we have clean water, nutritious food, and healthy ecosystems for years to come. They work directly with landowners to increase conservation practice adoption, research and measure soil and water progress, and create innovative systems and technologies to increase conservation efficiency. The conservation professional plays the most vital role in the conservation movement, and there is a need for SWCS to equip and encourage individuals and groups to push the movement forward and meet the growing demand.

At the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS), we advance the conservation profession and support conservation professionals across the country and around the world. With the renewed focus on conservation globally, we are seeing drastic growth in funding and job opportunities across the United States and globally. We are also at the beginning of a large influx of long-time professionals retiring. **SWCS strives to cultivate and support this new and growing community of conservation professionals, ensuring that we continue moving forward to a more sustainable future.**





Who We Are

SWCS is the premier international organization for professionals who practice and advance the science and art of natural resource conservation.

Mission

Our mission is to foster the science and art of natural resource conservation.

Impact Statement/Vision

Cultivate a diverse community of conservation professionals whose contributions create a bright future for our environment, agriculture, and society.

Audience

We support our community of more than 2,000 conservation professionals who represent nearly every academic discipline and many different public, private, and nonprofit institutions around the world. Our skilled members include researchers, administrators, planners, policymakers, technical advisors, teachers, students, farmers, and ranchers, all who share the common goal of building a more sustainable future.

A conservation professional is an unwavering advocate for conservation with steadfast curiosity and deep passion for our world's natural resources. Conservation is not just a job; it's a fundamental part of these professionals' identity. They are forward-thinking, determined, and are constantly seeking innovative and adaptable approaches to ensure a long-lasting impact.

Beyond our membership, we strive to promote and demonstrate the value of conservation to a broader group of stakeholders who depend on our soil and water resources, alongside our members. As we push to advance conservation, these stakeholders are essential to making conservation standard practice worldwide.

Value

- **Passion for stewardship and sustainability.** We are driven by our desire to help professionals and land managers identify and implement the best conservation systems to protect soil and water resources and to achieve global sustainability.
- **Commitment to science.** We value and promote the use of data-supported and fact-based science to advance conservation.
- **Respect for people and cultures.** We recognize the success of our mission relies upon people whose cultures and livelihoods are deeply connected to the land as well as consumers of food and fiber produced. We seek conservation solutions that will benefit and improve the quality of life for all people.
- **Focus on community.** We believe our greatest strength lies in uniting people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and ideas to inspire leadership, collaboration, and innovation within the conservation community.
- **Promise of integrity.** We promise honesty, transparency, and accountability in all interactions with members, partners, and the public as we work to fulfill our mission.

Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

SWCS seeks diverse voices, actively listens, engages in dialogue, thinks critically, and takes meaningful action toward creating institutions and systems that serve and value people equally. Our goals for the world's soil, water, and other natural resources cannot be realized without justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. We expect justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion to be a component of all projects. The Soil and Water Conservation Society denounces the systemic racism, discrimination, and inequality that exist today. Racism, discrimination, and inequality of any kind go against SWCS's core values, which include respect for people and cultures, and the unification of people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and ideas.





Our Approach

SWCS believes sustainable land and water management is essential to the continued security of the earth and its people. Conservation professionals are the driving force behind this critical mission, leading the way in global conservation efforts. We believe the best way to drive progress is by investing in and supporting professionals across all disciplines using a multifaceted approach.

We serve as a hub for building a vibrant and interconnected community of dedicated conservation professionals and partners, fostering a welcoming and supportive environment for all involved. We will continue to support our membership in promoting the value of conservation to soil and water stakeholders. We strive to support and empower our members by providing cutting-edge conservation research and news, relevant educational opportunities, and a platform for professionals worldwide to collaborate, partner, and share ideas.

- **Advance knowledge.** SWCS's exceptional publications, including the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, projects, and programs advance conservation science and the development of effective and sustainable management practices.
- **Support learning.** SWCS provides high-quality educational opportunities, training, and technical resources that equip conservation professionals to achieve excellence.
- **Foster communication.** SWCS shares important conservation news and research, and empowers conservation professionals to lead the discussion of natural resource conservation.
- **Advocate.** SWCS advocates for conservation professionals and their work, and promotes science-based conservation practices, programs, and policies.
- **Build community.** SWCS connects conservation professionals and partners in an active, supportive, and welcoming community.

Our Three-Year Goals and Outcomes for the Profession and Our Organization

SWCS strives for meaningful results as it allocates resources to foster the conservation movement and address specific priority opportunities. The three-year outcomes outlined in this strategic framework articulate overarching goals for both the profession and the organization, targeting 2027. These goals anticipate measurable outcomes that will serve as benchmarks for assessing progress and success.

Engaging in Science, Policy, and Practice

Industry Outcome:

Conservation professionals are informed. The voice of the conservation professional is influencing policy and program development.

Organizational Outcome:

SWCS is leading and influencing policy, partnerships, and projects that are developing new and existing conservation professionals and transforming the industry based on their needs.

Outputs:

- Special projects are strategically aligned with the organization's goals for the profession, enhancing capacity and fostering cross-organizational collaboration.
- Special projects are leveraging SWCS's unique, established position in conservation. They are building upon past and current knowledge, assessing and addressing the needs of conservation professionals, expanding adoption of conservation practices, spanning geographies, and having a multiscale impact—from on-the-ground initiatives to influencing national policies.
- SWCS is bridging gaps between science and practice, disciplines, and communities.
- Annual policy priorities are released and SWCS is engaging members and working with partners to advance shared priorities and respond to pertinent policy issues.

Equipping an Industry of Conservation Professionals

Industry Outcome:

Conservation professionals are equipped with essential skills and capacity.

Organizational Outcome:

SWCS is the go-to for industry resources and a platform for their voices.

Outputs:

- SWCS offers opportunities to publish and consume education and up-to-date information in research and professional development.
- SWCS content is easily accessible and there is growth in its usage by conservation professionals and the broader conservation stakeholder community.
- Content spans media platforms with outreach on new platforms conducted quarterly.
- Outreach is actively targeted to 1,500 new conservation professionals.

Cultivating a Community of Conservation Professionals

Industry Outcome:

Conservation professionals are entering the field, building community, and sharing knowledge across geographies, generations, disciplines, and lived experiences.

Organizational Outcome:

SWCS is offering pathways for conservation professionals to unite and make an impact through the organization.

Outputs:

- 15,000 conservation professional engagements with the SWCS network.
- 500 next generation conservation professionals engaging with the SWCS network.
- Annual endeavors are co-built with underserved populations.
- Annual endeavors are being co-built across a region.
- A hub of resources for building communities is developed and deployed.
- 10% of members are leading and mentoring through SWCS.
- Professional visibility is amplified by securing at least three feature articles or interviews in reputable industry publications, aiming for a 20% increase in social media engagement and followership, and receiving award submissions in every SWCS region.
- Outreach is actively targeted to 1,500 new conservation professionals.

Sustaining and Growing Our Organization

Industry Outcome:

Conservation professionals have a sustaining and growing association to serve and represent their needs and interests.

Organizational Outcome:

The organization and its leadership are supported and aligned as to best serve and represent conservation professionals.

Outputs:

- SWCS leadership is setting annual activity goals to align with the strategic framework and meeting regularly to grow individually and as a team.
- Balanced actual expenses and income is achieved annually.
- SWCS is automating and using the best nonprofit industry standards available.
- Headquarters and grounds are managed to serve as a space for the conservation and the surrounding community of people and nature.



Join Your Conservation Community

Throughout this framework, you will see a common trend: community. The growing community of professionals, partners, and stakeholders will drive the conservation movement forward throughout the next three years and beyond. Our community is united with the common goal of ensuring the future vibrancy and productivity of our world’s natural resources. Our community is composed of informed, dynamic individuals whose contributions create a bright future for agriculture, the environment, and society. Our community is supported and equipped with the tools needed to make a difference.

This framework is our blueprint to cultivate and advance the growing conservation community over the next three years. **Join us in a passionate pursuit of a more sustainable future for all communities.**

Join and Stay Connected

Become a Member of SWCS: www.swcs.org/join

Contact SWCS: swcs@swcs.org



