

Iowa Chapter Newsletter

Soil & Water Conservation Society
October 2023



Josh Balk President's Report

Fall is just the best and don't try to convince me otherwise. Between appreciating the beautiful leaves falling, scenic landscapes to enjoy a nice hike, cool evenings for bonfires and camping, and clear skies for star gazing (all while not freezing or sweating to death), pour me a pumpkin spice latte because it really doesn't get any better than this folks! Adding in harvest, trying to get the last conservation construction projects in place and cover crops on the ground, and finalizing outdoor tasks before the coming winter, it provides a chance to sit back and reflect, to take stock of the seeds we sowed earlier in the year, and exactly what we will have a chance to reap. Well, 2023 has not disappointed in the slightest here with SWCS.

Of course, hosting over 700 of our friends and colleagues here in Des Moines at the Conference was indeed a highlight. The hard work and dedication of our membership, the Iowa Chapter, and the National Headquarters crew to successfully pull off such a wonderful event is a testament to our team collaboration. As you can see in the delightful photo here, the SWCS Board of Directors recognized the Iowa Chapter as a 2023 recipient of the Outstanding Chapter Award for our accomplishments. It takes a village and wouldn't be possible without all our members to make this happen.

In a year as unprecedented as 2023 has been with droughts and climate extremes, the conservation work we do is so important. Helping our farmers and communities remain resilient, sustainable, and profitable is the balancing act while we work to protecting our water, land, and wildlife. The technical assistance we provide has such a key component in this and its importance and urgency have no signs of slowing down. SWCS is a network to help provide you with the shared experience and resources. Be sure to connect and utilize this to the full extent.

It has been an absolute pleasure to serve as your president over this last year. I'm still a bit



Josh with Clare Lindahl at the SWCS International Conference last August in Des Moines.

in shock at how quickly the term flew by. I will admit that even after serving on the board for the last 6 years now, I had a bit of hesitation initially in taking on the role of president and maybe required a bit of extra encouragement from others. Upon stepping into it though, I was instantly reassured by the wide support that the board and our membership provide. It never felt like a burden and every task became a team effort to tackle. If you have ever considered taking a more active role in our organization but are maybe a little uncertain, I would tell you to not fret one bit! We are so fortunate to have a wide base of enthusiastic individuals out there everyday supporting each other and the Iowa Chapter Board is no exception. Even if you just have a little bit of extra time you'd like to devote to something larger or you have an idea to make things better, please reach out and connect with us. We would love to put your ideas and talents to work. Much like my favorite phrase "we all live in a watershed and all have a role to play", I'll modify it a bit to "we are all part of conservation and all have a voice with SWCS". Be sure to use yours!

Thank you for all that you do out there! This is your president, signing off for the last time and welcoming in the new regime headed by Jerry Neppel. I am excited for the year ahead and all that we will accomplish together. Balk out!

mic drop

Iowa SWCS Board Members

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NORTHWEST AREA CHAIR

Dan Paulsen
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SOUTHEAST AREA CHAIR

Anshu Singh
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2023 Iowa SWCS Chapter Annual Fall Meeting Info

Submitted by Jerry Neppel, President-Elect

When a conservation practice is installed, there is an expectation that the practice will perform a certain way over a range of conditions. The outcomes from applying these conservation practices may be able to be measured (quantitative). Or, the outcomes may be qualitative. Sometimes the outcomes are both quantitative and qualitative.

The presentations scheduled for the annual meeting will document cause-and-effects of applying conservation practices or conservation systems producing water quality, landowner profitability, wildlife diversity, mussel species enrichment and mussel dispersion outcomes. These case studies are geographically located in the Loess Hills, southern Iowa and northeast Iowa.

In addition to the professional development presentations, the Iowa Chapter will hold its annual business meeting. An update on the Society will be provided by Regional Director Roger Wolf. Chapter leadership election results will be announced and a 2023-2024 chapter outlook will be provided.

The meeting will finish with overviews of the Iowa Hygienic Laboratory and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Laboratory followed by tours of the laboratories.

Plan to attend the meeting to engage with your colleagues and your professional Society!

Iowa SWCS Annual Meeting

Friday, October 20, 2023

DCI Criminalistics Laboratory on DMACC Campus

Rooms 207, 208, and 209

2400 DMACC Blvd., Ankeny, IA 50023

DETAILS

Cost:

\$25 for SWCS members

\$35 for non-members

\$15 for students

Registration Information:

Pre-register through Eventbrite by Thursday, October 12.

Payment can be made with a credit or debit card through Eventbrite, or with cash or check in person at the meeting, but registration must be completed through Eventbrite regardless of payment method.

Registration Link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/iowa-swcs-2023-annual-meeting-tickets-728411377037>

Elections Update: Greg Townley, Secretary

We are holding the election of Chapter officers at our Annual Meeting on October 20, 2023. You may vote anytime between now and October 20 using the link at the bottom of this article. If you would prefer to wait and vote at the annual meeting, there is an option to vote on a paper ballot or using a QR code that day. Results will be announced at the annual meeting. The following slate of officers is being presented:

- » **President Elect** - Miranda Haes
- » **Secretary** - Ann Wolf
- » **Membership Chair** - Caleb Rasmussen
- » **NW Chair** - Kelsi Sieren
- » **SE Chair** - Anshu Singh

The President Elect will serve in that role starting October 20, 2023, after the annual meeting and will become the 2025 President starting at the 2024 Fall Meeting and then will serve an additional year as Past President for 2026 starting at the 2025 Fall Meeting.

The Secretary, Treasurer, Northwest Area Chair, and Southeast Area Chair are normally elected in the fall of the odd numbered years and then serve for two years.



The term of office for these candidates will be from the Fall Meeting in 2023 to the Fall Meeting in 2025.

To vote in the election, please go to <https://form.jotform.com/232607305620144> by noon on October 20, 2023. (Thank you to Samantha Gorbet for creating the electronic ballot.)

Iowa SWCS Board Member Candidate Bios

Miranda Haes: President Elect



Miranda Haes is a candidate for Iowa SWCS President Elect. She serves as the North East Iowa Basin Coordinator with the Department of Natural Resources, Water Quality Improvement Bureau since February of 2022. Prior to this role, Miranda had been the WQI Project Coordinator for the Lower Skunk River Water Quality & Soil Health Initiative out of the Henry County Soil and Water Conservation District. She has

also worked with SWCD's in Johnson and Washington Counties, starting in 2015.

Miranda graduated from University of Iowa with a Bachelor's of Science in Geography - Environmental Studies in 2015. In her free time, she enjoys listening to live music, traveling, camping, hiking, kayaking, yoga, and most of all, spending time with her husband of 23 (almost 24) years, kiddos, and her huge family.

Ann Wolf: Secretary



Ann Wolf is a candidate for the SWCS Secretary position. Since 2021, Ann has served as Co-Program Director for MidwesthealthyAg.org, a division of Regeneration International, a research team that studies socio-anthropological data gathering, analysis and impacts in health and climate-change for rural based and under-served communities in the Midwest region. Her research office is in

Des Moines. Prior to her current job assignment, Ann served as Executive Director for Iowa Heartland RC&D, Indianola, from 2017-2021. For 25 years, her nonprofit professional leadership roles include health and public education curriculum development.

Her extensive experience in agriculture and conservation includes owning and managing her family's 300-acre farm in

Iowa SWCS Board Member Candidate Bios cont...

Jackson County in the state's Driftless region. She is very active with her farm operation on a daily basis. Ann has worked with USDA, NRCS, FSA offices out of Maquoketa for over 30 years in conservation planning, sustainable agriculture and land stewardship. The many NRCS-USDA CRP programs on her farm include pollinator (H.E.L.I.), wildlife habitat development, prairie planting, wetland establishment, timber (EQIP) reconstruction, stream bank restoration, riparian buffer strips.

Ann grew up in Clinton and has two grown children who also live in Des Moines. In her spare time she loves to travel with family and friends, spend as much time at her farm as possible, sports of all kinds-especially golf, cultural activities and just being outdoors!

Caleb Rasmussen: Membership Chair



Caleb Rasmussen, PE, is a licensed civil engineer (Iowa) with ISG and has been working with water resources and the agriculture community in a professional capacity since 2014. Caleb has been involved with watershed scale planning efforts to individual landowner projects across the State of Iowa working with public and private partners.

Caleb and his wife Rachael met in high school and have three children ages 4, 2, and 1 month. He and his family grew up and now live on his family farm in Audubon where he raises livestock and small grain. Caleb was a member of the Iowa National Guard from 2011-2017, where was a horizontal equipment operator and operations NCO.

In his free time, his hobbies include animal stewardship, hunting, fishing, and gardening.

Kelsi Sieren: Northwest Chair



Kelsi Sieren is a candidate for the Iowa SWCS NW Chair. She is the District Conservationist in Humboldt County and has served in this position for the last 1½ years, since February of 2022. Prior to being a District Conservationist, she was a Soil Conservationist in Kossuth County for 3½ years and interned in Linn County in the summer of 2017 and Washington County in the summer of 2016.

She grew up on a row crop and beef cattle farm near Keota, Iowa. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking at local parks, playing volleyball, traveling, reading, and spending time with her niece and nephews.

Anshu Singh: Southeast Chair



Dr. Anshu Singh has over 20 years of experience in wetland science, soil characterization, plant (aquatic and terrestrial) identification and urban landscaping. She brings extensive experience in large aquatic ecosystems, analyzing and interpreting surface water quality issues. During her PhD program, she conducted research at Nahant Marsh, one of the largest urban wetlands on the Upper Mississippi

River. She assessed and evaluated the presence and distribution of metals in water, soil, sediment, and [aquatic and terrestrial] plants to support informed restoration decision-making. In addition to scientific studies, she also provided technical support for the development of Phase 1 and 2 Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs) of the property and contributed to an important conservation effort in the Quad Cities that also had implications for site assessment and remediation at historically contaminated sites located along the Mississippi River corridor. Beyond her contributions to aquatic environmental science, Anshu has experience as a horticulturist and an entrepreneur. She is an Iowa Master Gardener and is a regular participant in conservation initiatives across the Quad Cities region – Like the entire Riverside team, she invests in the environmental well-being of our communities.

Anshu manages Riverside's water quality and lake restoration projects, as well as miscellaneous phase 1 and phase 2 ESAs, limited subsurface and contaminated sites investigations, site reconnaissance field visits and review of state and federal environmental databases. She also specializes in historical GIS records, with skills in historical map research and spatial analysis in Arc GIS and QGIS.

Anshu is Director of Sustainability and Conservation for Corn Belt Ports and involved in planning projects, building teams and coalitions to improve ecosystem sustainability in the Upper Mississippi River system.

78th SWCS International Conference!

Submitted by Courtney Allen

The Iowa Chapter played a significant role in co-hosting the 78th SWCS International Annual Conference, which took place in Des Moines, marking the first time in 28 years the conference was held in Iowa.

There was a record-breaking attendance of 720 individuals representing 5 countries and 45 states, 26% of the attendees being from Iowa.

The Iowa Chapter raised about \$1,500 in the silent auction at the conference.

Keep an eye out as details regarding the 2024 SWCS International Annual Conference will be released in the coming months!

View conference photos on the [SWCS Flickr](#).



Eye-Witness Report for 2023 SWCS Conference

Submitted by Olivia LaGrange, Easement Specialist, NRCS

I had the honor to attend the 78th SWCS International Annual Conference in Des Moines. The theme for this conference was "Healthy Land and Clean Water: Cultivating a Legacy of Conservation". Here in Iowa, numerous professionals from many different vocations gathered to hear about new technologies and research that aids to improve soil health and regenerate and retain clean water for future generations.

One of my favorite sessions to listen to that peaked my attention was a session lead by Keith Schilling, Iowa Geologic Survey. His topic was Design Criteria for a New Tile Drainage Conservation Practice in Grass Waterways. He prophesized that grass waterways can be used as a catchment for runoff from fields. Specifically, he and his team were working on design criteria for the drainageways so they could serve this purpose. He proposed that water quality after the waterway would have similar positive effects as bioreactors.

Another talk that played into the clean water theme was discussed by a former SWCS scholarship winner, Spencer Pech, ISG. Spencer spoke about the Watershed-Scale

Feasibility Assessment for Drainage Water Recycling Implementation. His talk supported the cause that in years of drought like 2017 in Iowa, water degradation assistance could be implemented to recycle for irrigation purposes. This would bring value to a drainage system, reduction in yield variability and have storage benefits for the landowner. The project was divided into 3 levels of interest: priority areas, irrigation infrastructure and landowner interest whose goal was drainage capacity. A few individual sites were tested, and positive results are ongoing.

The last topic that was one of my favorites was discussed by Jean McGuire and Jill Kostel of the Wetland Institute in IL. Jill discussed the benefits of building social capital with non-common ag partners. She stated, "relate to the client to overcome barriers and build relations". As an organization with wetlands in the name, she sought other ways to connect with potential partners who may otherwise affiliate the organization as the enemy to progress. However, together they lead an advanced conservation drainage training for NRCS, local government, co-ops, American farmland Trust and others. Jean also mentioned the key was to relate words with value to the partner such as referring to wetlands as part of the ag time drainage system and even alternative outlets.

Eye-Witness Report for 2023 SWCS Conference cont...

In other news, apparently corn cobs are 75% more effective in bioreactors than wood chips. That was according to a study called Comparing Woodchips to Corncobs: A Pilot Scale Denitrifying Bioreactor Study Evaluating Hydraulic Performance, Carbon Leaching, Nitrate Removal, and Costs by Natasha L. Hoover of Iowa State University. Neat!

I hope you all get a chance to attend the next SWCS International Annual Conference. Not only was it enlightening to see the great research out there, but it was also great to network with old friends and new.

Iowa Chapter Membership Recruitment

Clare Lindahl, SWCS CEO and Iowa Chapter Membership Chair

We are so excited to welcome nearly 165 new members who joined the Iowa Chapter after Iowa hosted the 78th SWCS International Annual Conference in Des Moines!

Let's increase our network—invite your friends, family, co-workers, partners, or anyone you know to join SWCS and get involved with you to network and meet people with similar goals.

Join at www.swcs.org/get-involved/join.

Member Benefits

As an SWCS member, you will:

- » Grow your professional network
- » Increase your visibility within the conservation profession
- » Unlock access to high-quality educational opportu-

nities, training, and technical resources, including continuing education credits

- » Connect with members of your local chapter

All members also receive:

- » Subscription to the [Journal of Soil and Water Conservation](#)
- » Weekly [Conservation NewsBriefs](#) and monthly [Conservogram](#) e-newsletters
- » Discounted registration to the SWCS International Annual Conference
- » Opportunity to nominate or be recognized by peers for work to advance conservation through the [SWCS Awards and Scholarships Program](#)
- » A 20% discount on SWCS publications (contact memberservices@swcs.org for more information)
- » Reduced rates for journal publication charges
- » Conservation slogan notebook (US residents only)
- » Free book: Soil and Water Conservation: A Celebration of 75 Years (US residents only)
- » Automatic membership to the Iowa Chapter

Two \$1,000 Memorial Scholarships Available

The Iowa Soil and Water Conservation Society is offering two memorial scholarships, each \$1,000 awards.

Applicants must meet the following criteria:

- » Be a resident of Iowa or attending college in Iowa.
- » Have completed a full year of college coursework in a natural resources related field; OR be employed in a natural resources related field in Iowa for a minimum of one year.
- » Have demonstrated integrity, ability and competence in their work.
- » Possess skills gained through training or experiences.
- » Be enrolled in the upcoming term.

First priority will be giving to applicants pursuing a full-time degree while attending school on a full-time basis. Second priority will be given to applicants doing single or multiple course work toward a degree while attending school part-time. Priority is also given to members of Iowa SWCS.

<http://iaswcs.org/student-scholarships>

Deadline extended to December 1!

20th Year for Iowa Conservation Team at RAGBRAI



This year marked the 20th anniversary of the Iowa Conservation Team organizing outreach efforts during RAGBRAI (the Register's Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa)! This year, the Iowa Conservation Team set up the tents in the following locations:

- » Monday, July 24 – near Early (Sac County)
- » Tuesday, July 25 – near Jefferson (Greene County)
- » Wednesday, July 26 – near Madrid (Polk County)
- » Thursday, July 27 – near Mitchellville (Jasper County)
- » Friday, July 28 – Chelsea (Tama County)

The team gave out nearly 6,000 bananas, plus donated over 600 to the Food Bank in Grinnell. Almost 3,500 conservation-themed postcards were mailed statewide, nationally, and internationally (including destinations in Poland, the UK, Chile, and Canada).

"It's amazing that we've kept this project going for 20 years and it's great to reflect on the impact of this outreach project. The opportunity to educate riders about conservation work across the state, specific projects within the county, and farming practices in general," said Alan Lauver, Van Master extraordinaire and NRCS Agricultural Economist.

The Iowa Chapter would like to thank all of the members of the Iowa Conservation Team including the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship, the Iowa Department of Transportation, Conservation Districts of Iowa, Milkweed Matters, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts for supporting this effort over the years. Also, a big thank you to Alan Lauver and all of the volunteers who helped make the 20th anniversary a great success!



Top: Iowa SWCS Southwest Chair Jon Tesdell sticks postage stamps on postcards at the Iowa Conservation Team tent on July 25 near Jefferson.

Middle and Bottom: Sights from the busy Iowa Conservation Team tent on July 25 near Jefferson. (Photos provided by Jon Tesdell)

REAP Assemblies to Gather Input

Submitted by Greg Townley

REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection) is a program in the State of Iowa that invests in the enhancement and protection of the state's natural and cultural resources. REAP Assemblies are being held this fall across Iowa to gather public input on administration of the program. REAP is administered by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Division of Soil Conservation (ID-ALS-DSC), Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI), and the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT).

REAP provides money for projects through state agency budgets or in the form of grants. Several aspects of REAP also encourage private contributions that help accomplish program objectives. REAP is funded from the state's Environment First Fund (Iowa gaming receipts) and from the sale of the natural resource license plate. The program is authorized to receive \$20 million per year until 2026, but the state legislature sets the amount of REAP funding every year. This year REAP was appropriated \$12 million.

When you add license plate and interest income, its total budget is about \$12.5 million. These funds go into eight different programs based upon percentages that are specified in the law.

The REAP fund allocation is as follows:

- » First \$350,000 each year goes to Conservation Education
- » 1% of balance goes for DNR Administration
- » Remaining balance is then divided as follows:
 - Roadside Vegetation 3%
 - Historical Resources 5%
 - State Land Management 9%
 - City Parks and Open Space 15%
 - Soil and Water Enhancement 20%
 - County Conservation 20%
 - State Open Space 28%

For more information, go to the REAP website: [Resource Enhancement and Protection \(REAP\) \(iowadnr.gov\)](http://ResourceEnhancementandProtection(REAP)(iowadnr.gov))

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