Guide to Partnerships for Producer-Led Watershed Groups

Last updated 4/2023

In this Guide, you will find an explanation of partnerships that exist within Wisconsin's Producer-Led Watershed Protection Program. This guide is for new and existing groups to reference when considering how different organizations might help them meet their goals. A different partner is listed on each page along with a description of what they do, the services they can provide and roles they can play for producer-led watershed groups. Contact information and a website for partners are listed on each page.

Benefits of Partnering with Organizations as a Producer-Led Group

Create time efficiencies. Farmers volunteer their time to participate in this program; partners can help with tasks to help the group function, stay on task, & achieve objectives in a timely manner.

Grow farmer engagement. Partners can help your group gain visibility through outreach, marketing & promotion to draw the right audiences to events & increase farmer involvement in group initiatives.

Reach conservation goals. Partners bring expertise in watershed management, strategic planning, agronomics, marketing, & other areas that involve skillls helpful to advancing goals.

Find conservation solutions. Research organizations and other partners can guide on-farm research trials & demonstrations to refine conservation practices and systems.

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Partner Roles

In addition to providing specific services to producer-led groups, the partners in this guide may also serve specific roles for groups that are necessary for participation in DATCP's Produce-Led Watershed Protection Grant (PLWPG) Program.

Collaborator: One of the requirements for applying for and receiving a PLWPG is that each group develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a collaborating entity. This can be a county land conservation department, non-profit conservation/agricultural organization, University of Wisconsin-Extension, or the Department of Natural Resources. The MOU indicates which tasks the organization will assist the group with and how the workload is structured and divided between the group and the collaborator. Collaborators often help groups with *goal setting, work planning, planning meetings, field days, assisting with farmer outreach, and managing incentive programs*.

Fiscal Agent: The fiscal agent accepts grant awards on behalf of the group to manage the funds, assist with reimbursements and other financial components of the grant. For a group to accept their own grant awards, they must be a legal entity such as a 501c3 organization, or they can have an outside organization serve as their fiscal agent. This can be the collaborator they have an MOU with, or it could be a different organization.

County Land & Water Conservation Departments

Each county in Wisconsin has a land conservation department (LCD). LCDs work with farmers and other landowners to implement conservation practices and conservation systems on their land. They offer technical expertise, conservation engineering assistance, and help people understand and enroll in county, state, and federal conservation programs. Some LCDs serve as collaborators for producer-led groups, depending on their capacity.

Services Provided:

- **Conservation technical assistance.** Designing practices and providing advice on conservation management techniques.
- **Conservation planning.** Conducting an assessment of your farm to determine opportunities for management changes and conservation practices to address any soil and water resource concerns or problem areas on the farm.
- **Nutrient management planning.** Depending on the county, some LCDs have agronomists on staff to help farmers in your group develop nutrient management plans.
- **Connection to incentive programs.** County LCDs can help your group understand the different funding opportunities available to landowners to ensure your group's incentive program complements any existing programs in your county.
- **Soil health programming.** Some counties are getting more involved in soil health and may work with groups to evaluate soil health through on-farm assessments or soil health testing.

Contacting your local land & water conservation department:

Each county LCD has a County Conservationist. This is likely the best first contact in getting connected. You can search for your county contact at wisconsinlandwater.org/members-hub/members

Farmers for Sustainable Food

Farmers for Sustainable Food (FSF) is a collaborative, non-profit organization that provides resources, advocacy, support and empowerment for farmers who are innovating and demonstrating sustainable farming practices during a time of increased interest in agriculture and food origins. FSF supports farmer-led conservation groups and develops and manages sustainability projects with farmers and supply chain partners.

Services Provided:

- **Administration.** Board assistance, membership, organization and more.
- **Event planning/execution.** Field days, annual meetings, trainings and more.
- **Communications and marketing.** Website, social media, press releases, newsletters and more.
- **Fundraising support.** Grant writing/reporting, sponsor material outreach.
- **Strategy.** Setting strategy direction for success.
- **Connections to technical support.** Organizational structure.
- **Project development/management.** Measure the impact of conservation practices.
- **Partnership development.** Connect farmers with industry partners.

Farmers for Sustainable Food

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Pheasants Forever

This organization has several different initiatives focused on conservation on farmland, one of them being their Precision Ag & Conservation Solutions program. Pheasants Forever supports agricultural producers and producer-led groups by assisting them in understanding how their farm specific data can serve as a guide to identifying areas where management changes and conservation programs can improve the profitability of low-yielding areas. Changes that are implemented as a result of this analysis are beneficial for wildlife habitat, building soil health, increasing water quality, and improving sustainability.

Services Provided:

- **Technical Support: Precision Ag Analysis.** Provide free, unlimited technical support in analyzing data using your preferred data platform.
- **Solutions.** Voluntary solutions for marginal acres that make economic and agronomic sense, while also furthering the mission of PF
- **Funding Opportunities.** A trusted resource in navigating all available land programs. Potential access to exclusive funding opportunities.
- **No cost services.** Services provided at no cost to producer. All programs are voluntary.

Contacts:

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PHEASANTS FOREVER AND QUAIL FOREVER
PRECISION AG & CONSERVATION
TURNING RED ACRES GREEN

River Alliance of Wisconsin

River Alliance of Wisconsin supports community-led river and watershed groups around the state. For 30 years, they have helped Wisconsin's many local watershed groups organize in their communities. They offer tools and training for groups to become effective water protection organizations and partner with them to share their successes with a broader audience of potential supporters.

Services Provided:

- **Capacity building.** They provide guidance on choosing the structure of your group, including guidance on becoming a non-profit, sample by-laws, organizational administration, and building an effective board.
- **Membership building.** They offer tools and strategies for building new membership or strengthening your group's membership program.
- **Fundraising.** They provide guidance and insight into different types of funding including foundation funding and raising funds through events. Opportunities for partnership grant applications.
- **Connecting to other water groups.** They can assist producer-led groups in building mutually beneficial relationships with other lake, river or watershed groups in their community.
- **Communicating successes.** They have useful water stewardship planning resources, including the Clear Water Farms Commitment, and will highlight water protection successes in their media and newsletters.

Contact:

Michael Tiboris
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608-257-2424 x125

Sand County Foundation

Sand County Foundation (SCF) supports farmers and other private land managers to ethically manage the natural resources in their care. SCF staff collaborate with multiple farmer-led groups to demonstrate cover crop grazing, prairie strips, prescribed grazing, and soil health improvement. They also help develop watershed-based projects that quantify and incentivize soil and phosphorus loss reductions from farmland.

Services Provided:

- **Outcome-based incentive design.** Advice and templates for whole-farm assessments of sediment and phosphorus loss under baseline versus alternative management practices, for potential use in nutrient trading and watershed adaptive management projects.
- **Funding for practices.** Performance-based conservation incentives for regenerative agriculture practices in the Lake Michigan basin and upper portions of the Wisconsin River basin; prescribed grazing, savanna restoration, agroforestry and prairie strips in the Driftless Area.
- **Technical assistance.** Design and implementation of prairie strips, grazing of cover crops, soil health management, and real-time monitoring of soil health metrics.
- **Farmer Mentorship.** Opportunities to lead as a mentor or learn as a mentee through the Land Ethic Mentorship for historically underserved farmers and ranchers.
- **Outreach.** Opportunities to showcase farmer leadership and watershed-based partnerships via Sand County Foundation outreach, videos, and media; yearly opportunities to nominate exemplary farmers for the Leopold Conservation Award®.

Contact:

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The Nature Conservancy

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. Our vision is a world where the diversity of life thrives and people act to conserve nature for its own sake and its ability to fulfill our needs and enrich our lives. Over the years, we have expanded our programs to work on diverse conservation strategies, including working with farmers. We undertake projects with farmers and the agriculture industry to install beneficial soil health practices on farms.

Services Provided:

- **Financial support.** TNC has provided funding to farmer-led groups since 2016 to support research, field trials, and incentives for farmers to try new conservation practices.
- **Technical Assistance.** TNC staff donate their time to help farmer-led groups shape field trials, field days, and cost share programs, and to track conservation improvements.
- **Promotion.** TNC staff work with farmer-led groups to share their work with key audiences including legislators and the media.
- **Research.** Conduct cover crop field trials with 15 farmers starting in 2022. Future plans include assisting with nutrient efficiency trials.
- **Outreach.** Create outreach pieces to share farmers' successes with new practices and lessons learned; help build relationships with Wisconsin legislators.

The Nature Conservancy

nature.org/wisconsin

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UW-Extension Natural Resources Program

The Natural Resources Education (NRE) team works together with other Extension programs to provide assistance around non-point source water quality issues and watershed group capacity building. Natural Resource Educators (NREs) are located in various watersheds across the state, and their work with producer-led and watershed groups is funded through state contracts.

Services Provided:

- **Development.** Organizational and leadership development support for watershed initiatives through strategic planning, facilitation, and partnership building.
- **Stakeholder engagement.** Engaging stakeholders to create and implement audience specific information/outreach strategies addressing the links between agricultural conservation and water quality.
- **Capacity building.** Increase the capacity of individuals, organizations and partnerships to address water quality issues through marketing and communications, behavior change theory, and evaluating capacity and outreach efforts.

To find your regional educator, visit:

https://naturalresources.extension.wisc.edu/programs/nre-program/

For specific program questions, contact:

Kris Tiles
Program Manager
kris.tiles@wisc.edu
715.216.2142

University of Wisconsin Nutrient & Pest Management Program

The University of Wisconsin's Nutrient and Pest Management (NPM) Program works with Wisconsin farmers, researchers, agricultural professionals, and citizens to provide research-based agricultural nutrient and pest management education and outreach on crop production practices that protect water quality, farm profitability and the state's diverse landscapes. NPM has regional and statewide specialists who work on nutrient, pest management and farm systems educational programs and has worked with over 30 DATCP producer-led groups around the state.

Services Provided:

- **Nutrient Management Education.** Teach in-person and online soil fertility, nutrient management planning, and SnapPlus workshops. These programs are grounded in university research and include state and federal nutrient management rules and regulations. A free, online, self-paced nutrient management planning training program is also offered.
- **Conservation and Agronomic Management Education**. NPM regional specialists provide tailored research-based presentations on cover crops, soil health, agronomic best management practices, conservation, and integrated pest management at field days, workshops, and conferences.
- **Trusted Agronomic Technical Support.** Provide no-cost science-based, technical agronomic and conservation management recommendations based on regional cropping and environmental conditions and needs. We partner with farmers, agronomists, researchers, and agency professionals to identify and test innovative crop, nutrient, pest, and conservation management practices.

To find a regional or statewide specialist, visit:

https://ipcm.wisc.edu/contacts/

Water Action Volunteer Stream Monitoring Program

Since 1996, the UW-Madison Extension Water Action Volunteers (WAV) volunteer stream monitoring program has collaborated with the Wisconsin DNR and over 40 partner organizations to recruit, train, and empower Wisconsin residents of all ages to collect high quality data on Wisconsin's 86,000 miles of streams and rivers. Each year, teams of WAV volunteers collect monthly stream data at approximately 500 wadeable stream sites across the state and submit the data to a DNR surface water database. The program aims to preserve, protect and restore Wisconsin's streams and rivers by training volunteers and community groups to gather high-quality stream data useful for decision-making and natural resource management.

Services Provided:

- **Free stream monitoring training and equipment.** WAV staff travel across the state training volunteers about stream health and on the methods used to monitor streams and submit data. Staff also provide free stream monitoring equipment to volunteer monitoring groups.
- **Support setting up a local volunteer stream monitoring group.** WAV builds the capacity of local groups and organizations to coordinate volunteer stream monitoring initiatives in their watersheds. More information on becoming a local WAV Coordinator: https://wateractionvolunteers.org/get-involved/become-a-coordinator/
- **Access to water quality data:** All stream health data collected by volunteers is publicly available and downloadable on our WAV Stream Monitoring Data Dashboard at https://wateractionvolunteers.org/data/.

Contacts:

Email: wav@extension.wisc.edu
Phone: 608-331-0173

Katy Bradford
WAV Program Manager

Emily Heald
Rivers Educator

UW-Stevens Point Center for Watershed Science & Education

The Center supports watershed stewardship across the state by assisting organizations and individuals with lake, river, groundwater, and drinking water quality testing and evaluation. The Center maintains a series of web-based interactive tools that provide access to data of interest to producer-led groups and conservation organizations. Staff routinely assist organizations with water quality outreach education, monitoring, and resource assessment.

Services Provided:

- **Water Quality Analysis.** The UWSP Water and Environmental Analysis Lab provides DNR and USGS certified water quality analysis of nutrients, pesticides, metals, and other emerging contaminants.
- **Data Collection.** Staff experienced in collection of streamflow monitoring, lake assessment, and well water quality evaluation;
- **Access to Data.** Maintain a database of well water quality results that is accessible online through the WI Well Water Quality Viewer.
- **Outreach.** Provide educational assistance on a variety of topics related to quality of surface and groundwater resources; work with communities and organizations to arrange water testing, streamflow monitoring, data analysis, and provide other technical expertise.

Contacts:

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Natural Resources Conservation Service

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has 54 local service centers that service all 72 of Wisconsin's counties. NRCS supports America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners by providing financial and technical resources. They promote systems of conservation practices that help producers improve their operations, reduce production costs and conserve natural resources. All work done with NRCS is voluntary, free and NRCS staff will work with producers of any scale in both rural and urban environments.

Services Provided:

- **Conservation Planning.** A conservation plan is an assessment of the land that helps determine how to achieve an operation's goals while managing natural resources including soil, water, air, plants, animals, and energy.
- **Conservation Technical Assistance.** Assist individual land users, communities, conservation districts, and other units of State and local government and Federal agencies to meet their goals for resource stewardship and assist individuals to comply with State and local requirements.
- **Financial Assistance Programs**. The NRCS provides funding to assist producers and landowners with conservation implementation through multiple programs. Information on all of these programs can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives

Contacting your local service center:

Contacting your local NRCS Service Center is the best first connection. Visit **www.nrcs.usda.gov/wisconsin#contact** to find a Service Center near you.

Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association

The Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) is a member-based organization founded in 1948 to serve the needs of the state's potato and vegetable growers. There are approximately 110 grower members, 200 Associate Division members (suppliers to the agricultural industry), and 150 Auxiliary members (primarily women who promote potatoes). The organization helps growers conduct and utilize the latest research and technologies related to farming and conservation while promoting the consumption of Wisconsin-grown potatoes and vegetables.

Services Provided:

- **Conservation practices.** The WPVGA works closely with UW-Extension and the Wisconsin Wetlands Association to promote and employ on-farm conservation practices.
- **Communication.** The WPVGA provides an important service in communicating and facilitating cooperation among farms and among different Producer-Led groups. We have coordinated field day events, educational meetings and farmer-to-farmer outreach events that connect farmers from different regions. We have also recently developed a water-related website: www.FarmersForCleanWater.com.
- **Financial assistance.** WPVGA provides in-kind and matching funds to members to assist Producer-Led Watershed Protection Groups.

Contact:

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Wisconsin Wetlands Association

Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) is a statewide non-profit organization focused on the protection, restoration, and enjoyment of Wisconsin's wetlands. Our work involves improving wetland policies and practices to better enable the watershed-scale restoration of wetlands to solve problems. We collaborate with farmers, local governments, legislators, and state agencies on a variety of initiatives designed to help address urgent and widespread water resource concerns. We are particularly interested in supporting farmer-led efforts to demonstrate and quantify how voluntary, watershed-scale hydrologic restoration can help reduce nitrate pollution, maintain groundwater supply, and increase resilience to severe storms.

Services Provided:

- **Technical advisor.** Watershed-scale hydrologic restoration projects.
- **Outreach assistant.** Assist with planning and facilitating field-based trainings and interactions with neighboring groups, planning and hosting workshops.

Contact:

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For more information about DATCP's Producer-Led Watershed Protection Program and our conservation partnerships visit:

https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/ProducerLedProjects.aspx

or contact:

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