



Water
Resilience
Collaborative

IOWA STATE
UNIVERSITY

Midwest Nature-Based Solutions Workshop

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

July 7–9, 2026

Quad Cities, Iowa / Illinois

WE WELCOME YOU

We are so glad you are joining us for these two days focused on advancing nature-based solutions across the Midwest. This workshop brings together people working across research, policy, planning, funding, and implementation, each with valuable experience and perspective to share.

More than anything, our goal is to create dedicated space and time for discussion. We hope these conversations allow us to learn from work already underway, explore common challenges, and identify practical opportunities to move these practices forward.

The ideas and experiences shared here will also help shape a set of case studies and guidance that can extend the conversation beyond this workshop. Our aim is to capture lessons from the group and share them in ways that are useful to others working to plan, fund, and implement projects and policies.

We are grateful to the organizing committee for the thoughtful discussions and planning that helped make this workshop a reality. We also appreciate the support of ISU Extension and Outreach and the Walton Family Foundation, whose funding helped make this gathering possible.

Thank you for making the time to be here and for bringing your experience, questions, and ideas to the conversation. We are excited about what we can learn from one another and what we can help build together.

Dr. Sara McMillan
Director, Water Resilience Collaborative
Iowa State University

WRC WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

TUESDAY, JULY 7

3:00 PM-5:00 PM

Nahant Marsh Tour

5:30 PM-7:00 PM

Dinner + Networking

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8

9:00 AM-9:30 AM

Day 1 - Welcome & Orientation

9:30 AM-10:00 AM

Planning Nature-based Solutions

for Watershed Resilience

10:00 AM-10:55 AM

Reflection, Breakout Discussion, & Report-out

10:55 AM-11:10 AM BREAK

11:10 AM-11:40 AM

Scaling Conservation from

Watershed Planning to Practice

11:40 AM-12:35 PM

Reflection, Breakout Discussion, & Report-out

12:35 PM-1:30 PM LUNCH

1:30 PM-2:00 PM

Investing Upstream for Downstream Water Resilience

2:00 PM-2:55 PM

Reflection, Breakout Discussion, & Report-out

2:55 PM-3:10 PM BREAK

3:10 PM-3:40 PM

Human Dimensions of Nature Based Solutions

3:40 PM-4:35 PM

Reflection, Breakout Discussion, & Report-out

4:35 PM-5:00 PM

End of Day Activity - Close Out

5:00 PM-6:00 PM BREAK

6:00 PM DINNER

THURSDAY, JULY 9

8:30 AM-9:00 AM

Day 2 Welcome + Key Takeaways from Day 1

9:00 AM-10:00 AM

Nature-based solution from idea to impact: Oxbows

10:00 AM-11:00 AM

Reflection, Breakout Discussion, & Report-out

11:00 AM-12:00 PM

Recap + Close Out

12:00 PM GRAB-AND-GO LUNCH

TUESDAY, JULY 7

3:00–5:00 pm

Nahant Marsh Tour with Brian Ritter; Steve Gustafson

5:30pm to 7:00pm

Informal Dinner | Armored Gardens, Davenport, IA

Optional arrival dinner gathering

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8

9:00AM-9:30AM

Welcome & Introduction

Sara McMillan

Iowa State University

9:30AM-10:55AM

Planning Nature-based Solutions for Watershed Resilience

Elliot Anderson; Mary Beth Stevenson

This session will explore how large watershed scale planning and partnership based implementation can help advance nature based solutions for flood mitigation, water quality, habitat, and other ecosystem service benefits. Presentations will highlight approaches for identifying priority locations, aligning partners around shared watershed goals, and evaluating progress toward multiple resilience outcomes.

10:00 AM-10:55 AM - Reflection, Breakout Discussion, & Report-out

10:55 AM-11:10 AM - BREAK

11:10 AM-11:40 AM

Scaling Conservation from Watershed Planning to Practice

Emily Zimmerman; Jill Kostel

This session will explore how watershed scale planning tools and innovative implementation models can help move conservation from identifying opportunities to putting practices on the ground. Presentations will highlight tools for identifying strategic conservation opportunities and case studies that demonstrate how these methods can accelerate implementation of Nature-based designs across the landscape.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8

11:40 AM-12:35 PM - Reflection, Breakout Discussion, & Report-out

12:35 PM-1:30 PM - LUNCH

1:30 PM-2:00 PM

Investing Upstream for Downstream Water Resilience

Ron Graber; Amy Kay

This session will explore how city water utilities and other downstream partners are investing in upstream conservation to support shared water resilience goals. Presentations will highlight opportunities to connect rural landscapes, working lands, and urban communities through nature based solutions that improve water quality, reduce flood impacts, support habitat, and create benefits across the watershed.

2:00 PM-2:55 PM - Reflection, Breakout Discussion, & Report-out

2:55 PM-3:10 PM - BREAK

3:10 PM-3:40 PM

Human Dimensions of Nature Based Solutions

Sara Carmichael, Adam Reimer, & A Marcelle Lewandowski

This panel discussion will explore the social, institutional, and practical factors that shape adoption of nature based solutions. Panelists will share perspectives on what supports participation, what gets in the way, and how programs, partnerships, and engagement strategies can better respond to the needs of landowners, communities, and implementation partners.

3:40 PM-4:35 PM - Reflection, Breakout Discussion, & Report-out

4:35 PM-5:00 PM

End of Day Activity - Close Out

Sara McMillan

5:00 PM-6:00 PM - BREAK

6:00 PM - DINNER | Jennie's Boxcar, East Moline, IL

THURSDAY, JULY 9

8:30 AM-9:00 AM

Day 2 Welcome + Key Takeaways from Day 1

Sara McMillan

9:00 AM-10:00 AM

Nature-based solution from idea to impact: Oxbows

Dane Cramer; Brandon Iddings; Drew DiAllesandro; Grace Yi; Karen Wilke

This panel will explore lessons from oxbow restoration experts on how to break down barriers and work across sectors to get a conservation practice to scale across Iowa. Panelists will share how they restored over 200 oxbows through strategic partnerships, diversifying funding, training others, and more. This replicable model will shine light on how to increase nature based solutions across a broad landscape with strong partnerships.

10:00 AM-11:00 AM

Reflection, Breakout Discussion, & Report-out

11:00 AM-12:00 PM

Recap + Close Out

Sara McMillan

12:00 PM - Grab-and-go lunch



ELLIOT ANDERSON

PRESENTER - PLANNING NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR WATERSHED RESILIENCE - **TALK TITLE** - MAPPING THE POTENTIAL FOR NATURE-BASED INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGHOUT THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER BASIN

Dr. Anderson is a researcher with the Iowa Geological Survey whose work centers on the statistical analysis and modeling of water quality in Iowa, primarily focusing on nutrients and sediment.



SARA CARMICHAEL

PANELIST

Sara Carmichael is a project manager for the Great Outdoors Foundation. She has trained as an environmental Scientist and has over 15 years experience in conducting educational programs related to public health, drinking water pollution, urban stormwater issues, the built environment, and outdoor recreation.



DANE CRAMER

MODERATOR

Dane Cramer is the Associate Director for Central Plains Conservation at American Rivers. He is a wildlife biologist and previously worked at Ducks Unlimited as part of a team of biologists, engineers, land protection staff, and other professionals responsible for the protection, restoration, and enhancement of wetland habitats.



CATHERINE DELONG

MODERATOR

Catherine DeLong is the Water Quality Program Manager for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the Extension Lead for the Water Resilience Collaborative at ISU. She works statewide to bring people together to share resources, ideas and perspectives about water quality, and to help Iowans understand the role they can play in the future of Iowa's water



DREW DIALLESANDRO

PANELIST

Drew DiAllesandro is the Illinois and Iowa State Private Lands Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Drew works to develop partnerships that mutually benefit wildlife habitat on private lands.



LOULOU DICKEY

MODERATOR

Loulou Dickey is a water resources scientist whose experience spans the consulting, government, and nonprofit sectors. As Executive Director of ISWEP, she helps Iowa communities turn scientific research into tools and resources for protecting water quality and meeting regulatory requirements.



RONALD GRABER

PRESENTER - INVESTING UPSTREAM FOR DOWNSTREAM WATER RESILIENCE - **TALK TITLE** - BRINGING URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES TOGETHER TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY IN THE LITTLE ARKANSAS WATERSHED

Ron Graber is an Extension Watershed Specialist in central Kansas. His primary focus is on educating local citizens about non-point source pollution issues and motivating these citizens to implement water quality restoration and protection actions. He has developed partnerships benefiting urban and rural interests in protecting water resources through the development and implementation of EPA approved watershed plans.



STEVE GUSTAFSON

PRESENTER - PARTNERS OF SCOTT COUNTY WATERSHEDS

Steve Gustafson is an environmental geologist. By day he is the Ecosystem Technical Manager/Hazardous, Toxic, Radiological Waste Subject Matter Expert for the Rock Island District of the US Army Corps of Engineers. He is also vice chair of Partners of Scott County Watersheds, on the board/volunteer for Nahant Marsh, on the board/volunteer for Xstream Cleanup/Scott County Waste Commission, and is in three bands.



BRANDON IDTINGS

PANELIST

Brandon Iddings is the senior conservation services manager for the Iowa Soybean Association. He works on edge of field projects mainly focused on oxbows, wetlands, prairies, and other nature-based practices.



AMY KAY

PRESENTER - INVESTING UPSTREAM FOR DOWNSTREAM WATER RESILIENCE - **TALK TITLE** - BRIDGING THE RURAL/URBAN DIVIDE FOR WATERSHED MANAGEMENT & HEALTH

Amy Kay works for the City of Davenport where she directs their NPDES, stormwater and watershed improvement programs. She works with many local organizations to improve water quality, reduce flooding, support biodiversity and overall watershed health.



JILL KOSTEL

PRESENTER - SCALING CONSERVATION FROM WATERSHED PLANNING TO PRACTICE - **TALK TITLE** - GROWING WETLANDS FOR CLEAN WATER

Jill Kostel, PhD, is the Water Resources Program Director for the Wetlands Initiative. Her responsibilities include being the project manager for the Wetland Initiative's "Smart Wetlands," which advances the use of small, farm-based constructed wetlands to naturally reduce nutrient runoff in tile drainage in Illinois and Indiana.



A. MARCELLE LEWANDOWSKI

PANELIST

Ann Marcelle Lewandowski is a Senior Research and Extension Coordinator at the University of Minnesota Water Resources Center. For 25 years, she has led teams of public and private sector partners from multiple disciplines to tackle water resource challenges in agricultural watersheds. Marcelle currently coordinates the Minnesota Office for Soil Health.



SARA MCMILLAN

MASTER OF DUTIES & MODERATOR

Dr. Sara Winnike McMillan is an ecological engineer and biogeochemist in the Department of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering at Iowa State University. She is also a Professional Engineer with expertise in restoration, natural infrastructure, and agricultural conservation.



NICK OHDE

MODERATOR

Nick Ohde is the Coordinating Director for the Mississippi River Basin with The Nature Conservancy. He leads collaborative strategy around river and floodplain conservation and supports regenerative agriculture work by connecting staff across the Basin who work in freshwater conservation, agriculture, science, government relations and fundraising.



ADAM REIMER

PANELIST

Adam Reimer is an outreach and evaluation scientist at National Wildlife Federation, where he conducts research on effective outreach strategies and applies behavior change principles to solving conservation outreach challenges.



BRIAN RITTER

PRESENTER

Brian Ritter serves as the Executive Director of Nahant Marsh and the Coordinator and Faculty for Eastern Iowa Community Colleges' Conservation program. He is also the Co-Principal Investigator for the EARTH Center, a National Science Foundation initiative to help America's community and tribal colleges prepare the nation's environmental workforce.



MARY BETH STEVENSON

PRESENTER - PLANNING NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR WATERSHED RESILIENCE - **TALK TITLE - CASE STUDY OF CEDAR RIVER AND CEDAR RAPIDS**

Mary Beth Stevenson has served since 2019 as the Watersheds & Source Water Program Manager for the City of Cedar Rapids. She leads watershed-based efforts to safeguard drinking water quality and reduce flood risk, working closely with partners to secure funding and build support from community and agricultural stakeholders.



KAREN WILKE

PANELIST

Karen Wilke is the Associate Director of Freshwater for The Nature Conservancy in Iowa. In her nearly 13 years with TNC, she has led their oxbow restoration program, Sustainable Rivers Program, and other in-stream and floodplain restoration projects to support biodiversity, water quality, and flood reduction.



GRACE YI

PANELIST

Grace Yi is a habitat viability manager at Practical Farmers of Iowa. In this role, she equips farmers and landowners with technical assistance and financial resources needed to establish and maintain wildlife habitats.



EMILY ZIMMERMAN

PRESENTER - SCALING CONSERVATION FROM WATERSHED PLANNING TO PRACTICE - **TALK TITLE - ACPF + 2 YEAR FLOODPLAIN**

In her role as the Director of Agricultural Strategies for The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin, Emily is focused on building and expanding opportunities for the state's farmers to adopt regenerative agriculture practices. She applies her research background quantifying economic and environmental outcomes to develop partnerships, empower farmer-led groups, and collaboratively find science-based solutions that work for nature and people.



Welcome to the Midwest Nature-Based Solutions Workshop.

On behalf of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, it is my privilege to welcome you to this gathering of researchers, practitioners, community leaders, and partners committed to advancing nature-based solutions across the Midwest. This workshop reflects the core values that guide our institution—service to the people of Iowa and stewardship of the land and water that sustain our communities.

Universities play a critical role in generating new knowledge, developing innovative tools, and exploring approaches that help address complex natural resource challenges. Through Extension, we bring that science into practice. Extension's mission is rooted in service: listening to communities, understanding local priorities, and working collaboratively to translate research into practical, effective, and locally relevant solutions. Stewardship is equally central to our work, reminding us that the decisions we make today shape the resilience and well-being of future generations.

This workshop provides an important space for shared learning across research, policy, planning, funding, and implementation. It allows us to explore what is working, identify persistent barriers, and strengthen the partnerships needed to support broader adoption of practices that enhance water quality, reduce flood risk, support habitat, improve agricultural systems, and benefit communities.

Thank you for contributing your expertise, experience, and commitment to this collaborative effort. We look forward to the ideas, relationships, and next steps that will grow from our time together.

Jason Henderson, Ph.D.
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
Vice President



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The **Nature**
Conservancy 

**WALTON FAMILY
FOUNDATION**

WORKSHOP ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Water Resilience Collaborative - Sara Winnike McMillan, Catherine DeLong

The Nature Conservancy - Nick Ohde, Karen Wilke, Megan Baskerville

Ducks Unlimited - Casey Bergthold, Holly Shutt, Alex Wieten

Great Outdoors Foundation - Sara O'Connell, Sara Carmichael, Melissa Campbell

American Rivers - Dane Cramer, Mike Shannon, Mike Sertle, Sara Burns