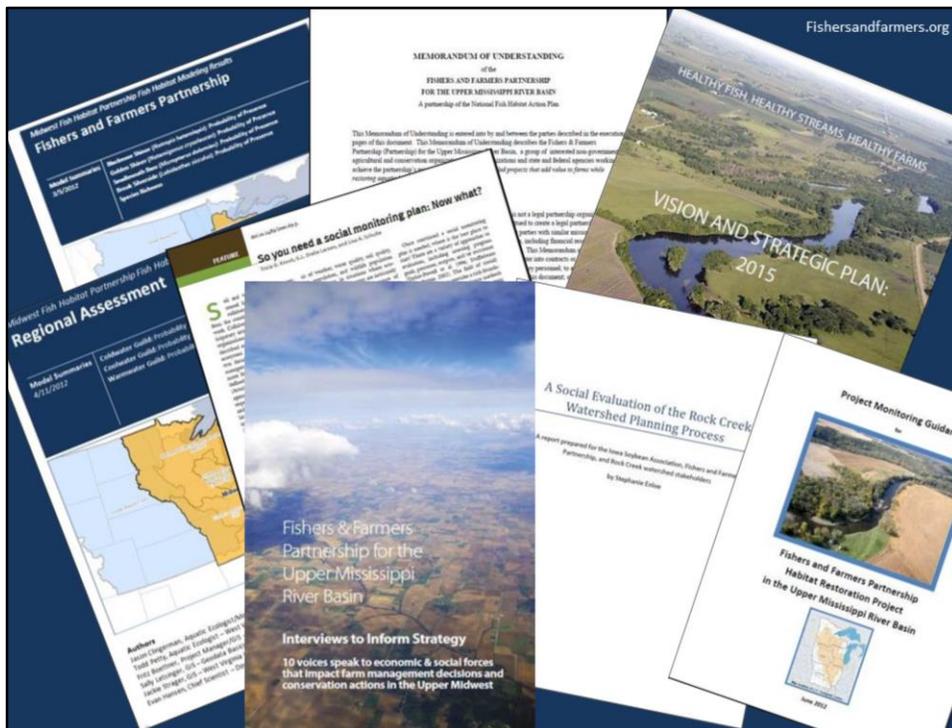




Vision, Collaborative Leadership, Conflict Management, Accountability, Community Collaboration, Facilitation, Strategic Thinking, Partnership management – all these topics that we are discussing in the Managing by Network class really have played a large role in Fishers & Farmers Partnership and our projects. I'm very excited to share information about our Partnership and the development of our Watershed Leaders Network. I won't be able to get into detail about our individual projects, so please visit our website to learn more. Please type any questions in the chat box as I'm presenting and I will try to answer at the end if there's time. If we run out of time, I will copy the questions and send you my answer through an email.

Far too long biologists and conservationists pointed fingers at farmers for water quality issues instead of trying to help them. Many programs, projects and organizations attempted to offset the consequences of poor farming practices, but with few documented results. Some programs have focused on water quality and some on fisheries, but there weren't programs that focused on both. So agricultural and Natural Resource Leaders came together in 2008-2009 to form Fishers & Farmers and take a new approach in an environment of mutual respect that cultures and takes advantage of the expertise and knowledge of both groups.



In 2008-2009 Nancy North from NewGround Inc. interviewed people in food production and ag leadership to help inform those that were creating the Fishers & Farmers Vision and Strategic Plan. The Plan, woven together with careful consideration of comments from the interviews, was finalized in 2009 and has been updated every 3 years or so. We also have a signed Memorandum of Understanding between the partners. The members agree to uphold the goals, strategies, and operating principles of the Fishers & Farmers as described in its Strategic Plan and MOU.

One of our founding organizations, Iowa Soybean Association, & our Science Team developed a FFP Project Monitoring Guide, which includes social monitoring that our projects follow. Fishers & Farmers monitors biological, chemical, physical and social aspects of projects when and where we can. We really believe both biological and social monitoring is important not only for accountability but also to see and create even more positive change in watersheds.



Fishers & Farmers Partnership for the Upper Mississippi River Basin is made up of both Natural Resources and Agricultural Groups in the 5 states that make up the Upper Mississippi River Basin. Active agricultural organizations include Iowa Soybean Association, MN Corn Growers, and Wallace Pasture Project (Grazing Org WI).

Mission: “to support locally-led projects that add value to farms while restoring aquatic habitat and native fish populations.” We have found out that throughout the Basin we are more successful in putting farmers in the lead and working with farmer-led committees. Most of our projects have a farm-led committee or are in the process of initiating one.

This is a picture of our Steering Committee touring one of our projects in Seven Mile Creek Watershed, MN.



The Steering Committee works together to decide which fish habitat projects, both instream and terrestrial, receive funding. Dirt-moving and outreach projects include oxbow restoration, managed grazing, watershed workshops, field days, float trips and training. Members of the Steering Committee are creative movers and shakers that bring many talents along with them. They find that they can accomplish much more together than they can in their individual organizations. Fishers & Farmers works as a catalyst to bring in more flexible funding, technical assistance, and watershed leaders.





We don't just talk the talk. This is one of our Co-Chair's Rod Ofte, a 4<sup>th</sup> generation farmer who raises grass-fed beef near Coon Valley, WI. He's talking to members of our Steering Committee, including Martin Konrad (IA DNR – Fisheries) and Adam Birr (Director of MN Corn Growers) about how managed grazing is not only productive for him, but also the 1<sup>st</sup> class brook trout stream you see flowing in the background. Trout biologists from this area will tell you that managed grazing or continuous perennial cover is what brought back our brook trout habitat after the brink of its destruction during the early 1900's. This area now brings in millions of dollars in fishing and tourism.

We finally realized that Fishers & Farmers really was successful when Minnesota Corn Growers took one of our proposed fish habitat projects and funded it!

**Ravine Workshop**  
 Tuesday, April 8, 9 AM - 3 PM  
 Best Western Mankato  
 1111 Range Street, North Mankato, MN

Learn the Latest Science      Regional Case Studies  
 Restoration Practices      Get your questions answered

**Sign up today**  
**Everyone is welcome**  
 Free Admission & Lunch  
 To Register: [mnravines.org](http://mnravines.org)  
 Call: 507-389-2704  
 or 507-389-5307  
Event fills with first 100 registrants.  
 This workshop is intended primarily for  
 landowners and local staff.  
 Sponsored by:

**Draft Agenda**  
 9-9:30 AM Networking & Coffee  
 9:30-10:15 Ravine Research - Patrick Belmont  
 10:15-11 Restoration Practices - Marty Melchior, Inter fluve  
 11-12 Regional Case Studies  
 12-1 PM Lunch  
 1-3 PM Workshop Sessions & Information Stations  
(Learn more about grass waterway, surface inlet & berm  
 structures, wood-chip bio-reactor and others)

Coordinated by: Workshop Planning Committee:  
MNRMS - Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Inter-River Inc.,  
 Blue Earth County SWCD, Scott County SWCD, United Ag Tech, Hobbseygreen Farms  
 For more information: [mnravines.org](http://mnravines.org)

FFP has been careful in selecting watersheds and trying to engage stakeholders in various ways.

This Ravine Workshop in Mankato, MN was very successful with 180 farmers/landowners in attendance.



## FARMER-LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT

We heard from farmers that one of the most helpful speakers was a successful farmer that had worked on ravine stabilization on his own farm in Wisconsin.



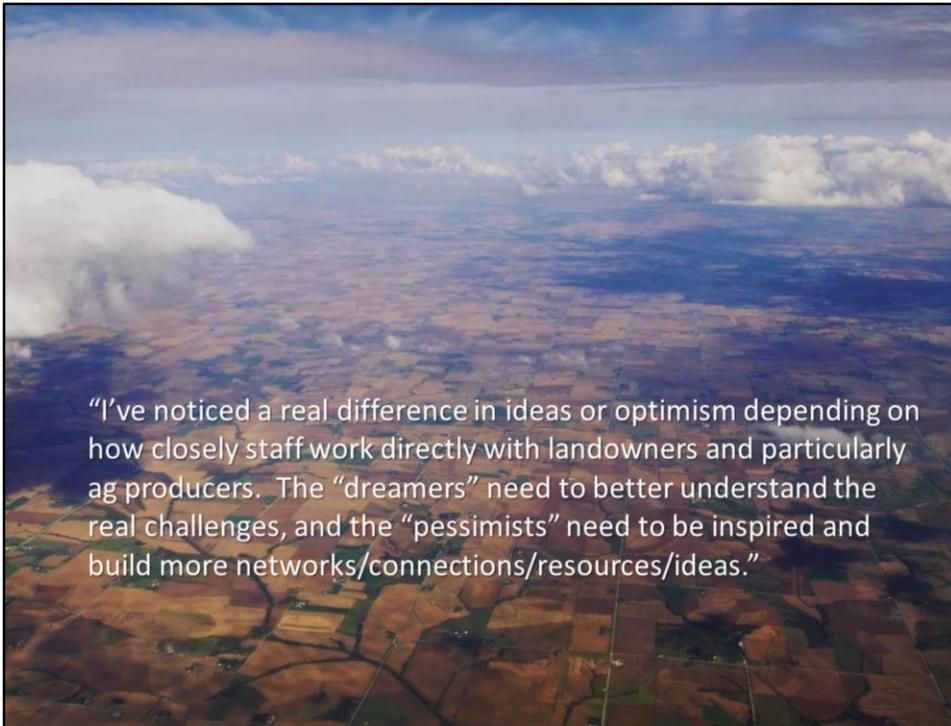
Other ways we've been engaging with farmers include field days where we tour fish habitat projects, show live fish, highlight cover crops, and simulate real life situations with our stream table and rain simulator.



# Stakeholder Engagement Training



Students of the course had a lot of hands-on interaction such as using a “Conversation Café” method of discussion and filling out the Spectrum of Stakeholder Participation for their watershed.



“I’ve noticed a real difference in ideas or optimism depending on how closely staff work directly with landowners and particularly ag producers. The “dreamers” need to better understand the real challenges, and the “pessimists” need to be inspired and build more networks/connections/resources/ideas.”

We always send out surveys after any trainings or workshops and one of the comments of this workshop really hit home for me – “I’ve noticed a real difference in ideas or optimism depending on how closely staff work directly with landowners and particularly ag producers. The “dreamers” need to better understand the real challenges, and the “pessimists” need to be inspired and build more networks/connections/resources/ideas.”

Working in the agricultural landscape I’ve observed both dreamers and pessimists. We need to work with both if we really want to create positive change. There have actually been biologists that have given up and changed jobs or moved because they feel like they’ve hit a brick wall.

*\*\*\*Interaction: Do you tend to be a “dreamer” or a “pessimist”? If you are a “dreamer” how have you tried to understand the real challenges? If you are a pessimist how have you tried to build more networks, connections, resources, ideas? Share in the chat box what is your tendency, and how you are working to expand your point of view.*



To bring a better understanding between some of our “dreamers” and our farmers, I asked one of our farmers to bring in his farm budget to one of our Steering Committee meetings which you see here. As non-farmers we hear about how great farmers have it with crop insurance and large payouts they receive from corn production, but we don’t hear about how much farming actually costs and how much they lose during the bad years.

Have you ever received a bill, for working a month? Believe it or not, many of our farmers in Wisconsin have. Due to both economics and the next generation not wanting to farm, we are losing thousands of dairy farms. Small farms are almost a thing of the past. Conservationists in the Midwest have to really keep economics and risk aversion in mind when talking to farmers. It’s very important to know landowners’ priorities, and to speak from those.



There is some fatigue with traditional agriculture and conservation services

Such as commercial crop advisors who don't necessarily have the tools and background to develop farm plans with attention to streams or whole watersheds

There is a need among conservation minded landowners to see adoption and change speed up.



If aware, but isolated,

many innovative farmers stall out for lack of peer support and connection to a larger effort.



## PEERS ARE AMONG THE MOST POWERFUL INFLUENCERS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

We have looked at agricultural communities across this big basin – places we know – and have seen power where landowners ACT and LEAD in their own home areas. We also saw that where farming neighbors GOT TOGETHER to learn, plan, and make shifts ALL AT ONCE, positive shifts were happening...

Some farmer-led groups made big strides, but most struggled and made only marginal gains.

When a respected landowner makes a shift on the land that works, others follow.



ASKING and LISTENING for many months made a number of social forces clear.

And it reinforced that while we want projects to move fast,

Change only happens at the speed of earned trust.

And building that trust requires good planning and time.



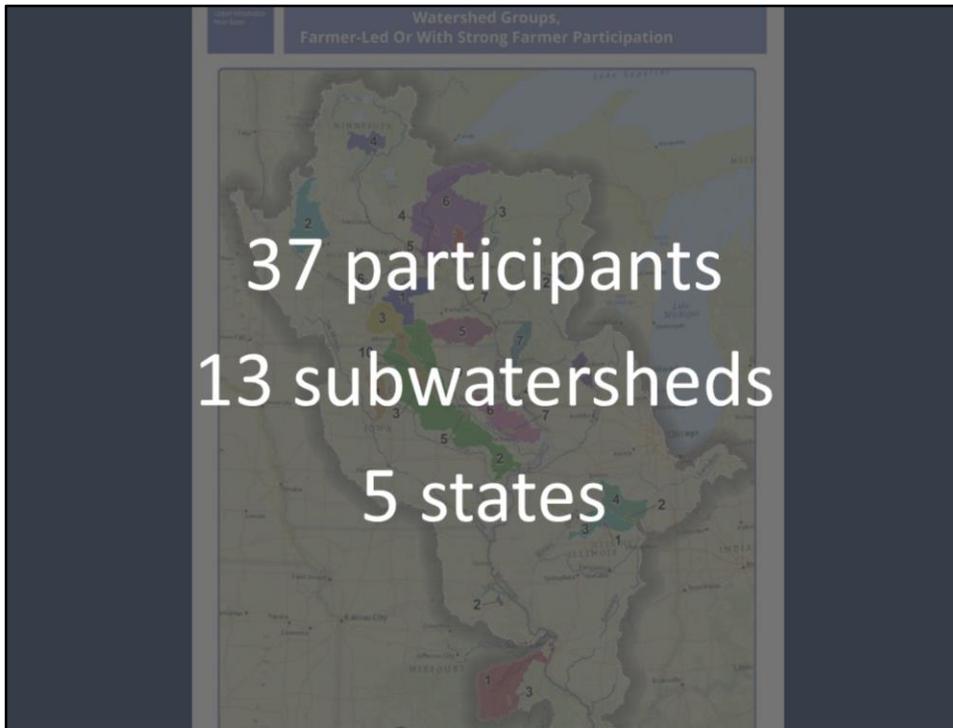
For the past three years, with the help of Nancy North, we've been creating the Watershed Leaders Network. It took a year of inquiry, and a year of developing programming, messaging, and communication tools. It's a peer-to-peer learning and action network for agricultural landowners and their local collaborators. I'm going to share with you what we've learned, but to also ask all of you about how to make it even better.



Seeing a need for peer connections—and a new way of connecting around this work— We focused on developing two, 3-day workshops

For members of locally led watershed groups with strong farmer involvement. It was an experiment.

Would time apart from routine life, and addition of a connection to peers, and a setting for exploration activate local leaders?



Of the participants, the majority were farming landowners, But there were also watershed project coordinators, a SWCD board member, a crop advisor, social worker (also the wife of a farmer), a League of Women Voters volunteer, Ag excavator, and curious professional staff



This Missouri farmer, John Scherder, was suspicious of us when we met before the workshops...and suspicious of environmental groups overall. At the first workshop John was hesitant to voice his opinions and concerns, but by the end of the second workshop, it was hard to get John to stop talking.

There is real, and often justified, suspicion, even among landowners who see the issue and are working for change. The truth is, without knowing we're doing it, conservation personnel often approach projects as though we know THE answer, asking, essentially:

How can I twist the landowner's arm to make this happen? We see this especially with federal agencies.

If we're working as true collaborators and partners, we might rather say: "This is an important situation for all of us. Here's what we know."

And then ask: "Together, how can we facilitate strong, long-term decisions for a stable landscape and community?"



So we asked natural resources personnel to be themselves, but arrive without logos.

This helped landowners see them as humans who don't have all the answers,

And made it easier to work as equals.



When planning and effective facilitation is SO IMPORTANT to success with groups,

It's important to hire skilled staff And budget for it, along with clear communications. Having a third party not connected to either "side" helps both parties involved feel that they are not being manipulated.

Activities at both workshops were built on conversational methods that draw on collective wisdom and the self-organizing capacity of groups...

We drew largely from a suite of practices called Art of Hosting Conversations That Matter.

Tracy Chaplin, our facilitator, is a global steward for Art of Hosting, and played a key role in making this work.



## ACKNOWLEDGE COMPLEXITY

There was relief in the room when we recognized OUT LOUD that these are complex situations that require the knowledge and experiences of all involved.

Yes, there's a glazed over look at times, too, but it's a relief to know that

NO ONE PERSON HAS TO HAVE, OR WILL HAVE THE ANSWER.



Implementation is clearly in the hands of individual landowners.

But solutions can only be found in collaboration with others, because the situation is so complex.

Jeff Pape (in the blue shirt on the right) leads the successful local watershed group Hewitt Creek.

He says the group thrived when farmers learned and decided together what practices to use in their landscape, then had money to distribute THEMSELVES to get the work done. When more strings were attached and funding diminished, momentum slowed up.

This points to the need for trust between project partners, and simplified process.



At the workshops, teams from five states looked at barriers to their local work.  
They brought their varied expertise and viewpoints to the table,  
To identify local next steps.



All people and the dynamics of each place are different,

And diverse skills are needed.



This prairie strip on Tim Smith's farm in north central Iowa helped others in the workshop visualize one solution.

Local teams drew on his story and photos to create their own vision for their landscapes. Often we just need a clear focus on where we're going.

And it needs repeating so we don't lose our way. It doesn't have to be elaborate, but it's something to commit to doing.

Hearing "success" from a biologist is not the same as hearing it from a farmer. Hidden agendas are assumed when the message comes from agency personnel. In the workshops farmers shared success stories with other farmers in a "five minute spin" and topics included Prairie STRIPS, Cover crops, managed grazing, oxbow restoration, and other practices. Farmers truly heard success.



Impacting change is every biologist's dream, but very few know how when it comes to farmers. At the workshop landowners were asked what they thought the highest leverage point for impacting change was and these are some of their responses...



To anchor the Network, we developed website pages that core participant groups were trained to use and update themselves.

Fishers & Farmers Partnership Watershed Leaders Network | Workshop August 1-3 | SurveyMonkey  
Follow-up survey

Q2 Is there something you've already done or plan to do because you attended this workshop? How can we support you in that work now, or at our November 28-30 workshop? Specific needs? Specific things you want to learn?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0

Responses	Date
Scheduled a group meeting to discuss what our next step will be in our watershed. Want more info on water testing.	8/23/2018 8:44 PM
Am going to try to find different ways to get grant money into our local watershed.	8/23/2018 8:41 PM
Speak with crop advisors about helping support watershed projects and inquire if they are willing to provide incentives on their farm.	8/23/2018 4:33 PM
of our larger watersheds. These stories were very inspiring and motivational with groups across the Missouri. We have more work to do to get back to our group and discuss. All the feedback from some additional planning time among our farmers. We really enjoyed the Wednesday Innovation	8/18/2018 10:36 AM
perform our farmer-led project meetings, had already had several	8/15/2018 10:00 AM
need display, etc to evaluate the success of that in our	8/14/2018 8:08 AM
8/14/2018 5:00 PM	8/14/2018 5:00 PM
8/14/2018 12:01 PM	8/14/2018 12:01 PM
8/11/2018 11:52 AM	8/11/2018 11:52 AM
8/11/2018 9:55 AM	8/11/2018 9:55 AM
8/10/2018 3:43 PM	8/10/2018 3:43 PM
8/10/2018 7:12 AM	8/10/2018 7:12 AM

**DOCUMENTATION**

2 / 15

We documented the workshops and learned from post-workshop surveys.



In response, all participants asked for more.

MOST say they will pay for future workshops and related expenses. This was a Root River canoe trip that the participants went on to learn about how different farming practices impact the stream, fish and water quality. There were a couple of farmers that had never canoed before.



They said we need to support good project managers. It's important to hire people who have a desire and the skills to connect with landowners. Many of us call these "soft skills". It's important to recognize that not all people have these— sometimes not even the county conservationists. I had a county employee tell me, "I can't go knocking on doors," we wait for farmers come to us. Fishers & Farmers and several of our partners are saying you may not have to if you use "Conservation Marketing." Rob Pulliam from the Missouri Department of Conservation explains it as networking and building local trust such as visiting coffee shops, talking to the farmers, and really getting to know members in the community. When speaking with farmers and ranchers Rob inserts conservation into a business model that they understand. Now farmers come knocking on Rob's door with conservation projects that they want to do. Because of his networking, Rob has helped farmers initiate and lead two different Farmer-Led Committees in different watersheds in Missouri.

It's important to support those project managers in their roles, so they hold up under a challenging task.

We must provide what's necessary to keep them in a place for an extended period of time, so the relationships and projects they develop bear fruit. In all our FFP projects we make sure we have a Watershed Coordinator or strong project manager. We've found across the Mississippi River Basin that what is lacking isn't always funding or even willing farmers, but the stability and support of a watershed leader to assist the

farmers. These positions are too often held by short-term lower paid individuals.



## TELLING ABOUT THEIR WORK

Watershed Leaders are telling about their work and local activities to others. During the Watershed Leaders Network workshops everyone shared what they learned and what tools or or ideas they were going to use in their watershed. They listed next steps and things they needed from Fishers and Farmers Partnership. We are now checking back with each other and are holding each other accountable for our actions so that we both will accomplish more.



Knowing they are part of a bigger effort gave the Watershed Leaders energy and purpose, and is motivating focused work.

They are going to each other's events. Leaders from the Kickapoo Watershed in WI & Galena River Watershed IL, traveled to Stevens Point, WI to talk with Mill Creek Watershed farmers and tour their cover crop fields. Fishers & Farmers is also lending their Soil and Stream Health trailer or other technical assistance to the watersheds for hands-on learning and engagement of landowners.



There are no shortcuts. We must make time, create conversations that connect people, and recognize and draw on local knowledge, so long-term shifts on the landscape are more likely.

Today I've shared some practices Fishers & Farmers is using to engage private landowners, but I'm always looking for ways to improve. Who here today is working with private landowners? Can you please raise your hand so I can call on you to come on the line share some of your practices?

Of course one of our biggest hurdles in all of this work is funding. It's hard for our project managers to find money to support this social work. A lot of the federal funding comes with strings attached and projects have to be "shovel-ready." Our states once were able to drive some of these projects, but now can't because they can't find matching funding. How are some of you working through these funding issues? Please type your response in the chat box.

If there's time I'd love to take any questions or if you have a question for me offline, feel free to email or call.

Thank you