



# Leadership for Midwestern Watersheds

**AGENDA**  
**FEBRUARY 25-26, 2026**  
**BARABOO ARTS BANQUET & CONVENTION CENTER**  
**323 WATER STREET, BARABOO, WI 53913**

A NETWORK FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AMONG AGRICULTURAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

## Tuesday, February 24th

6:00 PM Pre-event Social: Appetizers and Cash Bar  
 (Gem City Saloon & Eatery, 124 Ash St)

## Wednesday, February 25th

8:00 AM Registration and breakfast

9:00 AM **Welcome and Introductions**  
*Haleigh Summers & Craig Ficenec,  
 Sand County Foundation*

9:15 AM **The Next Generation of Regenerative Agriculture Partnerships and Priorities in the Midwest**  
*Rod Snyder, Junction Strategies, LLC*

10:00 AM Break

### 10:30 AM **Opening Activity**

11:15 AM **Landscape Approach to Regenerative Agriculture and Water Stewardship**  
*Kelsey Ryan, Nestlé Purina*

### 11:30 AM **Coffee Shop Farmer Discussion**

*Rachel Bouressa (WI), John Meyer(MN), Joe Stuckel (IL), Tim Welsh (IA), Darren Yanke (WI)*

12:00 PM Lunch

### 1:00 PM **Coffee Shop Discussion Continued**

### 1:45 PM **World Cafe**

2:15 PM Break

2:45 PM **A Midwestern Farm Economy Outlook**  
*Paul Dietmann, Compeer Financial*

### 3:15 PM **Conservation Financing Discussion**

3:45 PM **Getting to 'YES' for Conservation**  
*Serge Koenig, Sauk County Land Resources and Environment*

4:10 PM Wrap up

4:30 PM Adjourn

### 4:40 PM **Optional Baraboo River Walking Tour**

6:00 PM Dinner and Cash Bar  
 (AL. Ringling Brewing Co., 623 Broadway St)  
 Optional mansion tour (\$8/person)

## Thursday, February 26th

7:30 AM Breakfast

8:00 AM **How Data and Economics Can Maximize the ROI of Conservation and Water Quality Efforts**  
*Mike Kinney, Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District (MN)*

8:30 AM **Batch and Build: A Practical Implementation Framework for Watershed Improvements**  
*Chuck Brandel and Erin Dwenger, ISG, Inc.*

8:55 AM Break

9:20 AM **Crowdsourcing Conservation: Localized, Farmer-led Incentives**  
*Craig Ficenec, Sand County Foundation*

9:30 AM **Batch and Grow: Scaling up Cover Crop Adoption**

*Patrick Bula (WI), Scott Hendricks and Allisen Freihage (IA), Helen VanBeck and Morgan Cauble (IL)*

10:00 AM **Batch and \_\_\_\_\_ Panel**

10:30 AM Break

### 10:45 AM **Closing Activity**

12:00 PM Lunch and Adjourn

1:00 PM **Optional Tour of Bula's Pleasant Valley Farm**

Presented by Sand County Foundation with financial support from the following sponsors





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**SPEAKER BIOS**  
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## **Rachel Bouressa - Farmer, Waupaca County, WI**

Rachel is a 5th-generation farmer and 2nd-generation grazier in Waupaca County, Wisconsin, where she raises about 100 head of mostly British White Park cattle on permanent pasture, cover crops, and warm-season grasses. She also serves on the state Natural Resources Board, and engages with numerous other organizations regarding water quality and sustainable agriculture. When not working on or off the farm, she enjoys spending time with her two young children and getting time on the water as an avid paddle-boarder, and always strives to look at water each day.



## **Chuck Brandel, PE - Business Unit Executive, Water Civil, ISG, Inc.**

Chuck is a national expert in agricultural drainage and watershed management, recognized throughout the upper Midwest for delivering innovative and practical solutions to complex water management challenges. He works closely with landowners, drainage authorities, watershed districts, and regulatory agencies to guide projects smoothly through planning and implementation. With a forward-looking approach to multipurpose drainage management, Chuck helps projects enhance agricultural productivity while protecting water quality and the environment.



## **Patrick Bula - Conservation Specialist, Sauk County Land Resources and Environment**

Patrick has worked in county and federal conservation since 2017, providing farmers with technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices on working lands and collaborating with producer-led watershed protection groups, including Eau Pleine Partnership Integrated Conservation (EPPIC) and Sauk Soil and Water Improvement (SSWIG). Patrick is also part-owner of Bula's Pleasant Valley Farm, where he manages grass-finished beef and lamb, pasture-raised poultry, crops, and direct-marketing enterprises.



## **Morgan Cauble - Midwest Watershed Specialist, American Farmland Trust**

Morgan's work primarily focuses on assisting producer-led watershed initiatives across Illinois, including the statewide Farmer Led Advances in Soil Health (FLASH) initiative. She earned her Bachelor's degree in agricultural finance from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Before joining AFT, she worked in collaboration with the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop conservation plans and assist farmers in working toward their sustainability goals.



## **Paul Dietmann - Vice President of New Markets, Compeer Financial**

Paul leads Compeer's Emerging Markets program, providing loans and business planning assistance to farmers who market their products directly to consumers or who are engaged in value-added production, processing, or marketing. He also leads the co-op's Young, Beginning and Small (YBS) Farmer program. Paul has been helping family farmers with farm financial management issues since the mid-1990s, first as a county agricultural agent, then as Director of the Wisconsin Farm Center, as Wisconsin's Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, and now with the Farm Credit System.



## **Erin Dwenger - Graduate Engineer, Water Civil, ISG, Inc.**

Erin specializes in surface water engineering, focusing on edge-of-field conservation practices like saturated buffers and bioreactors. With expertise in Civil3D, ArcGIS Pro, HydroCAD, and HEC-RAS, she designs solutions that improve water quality and offer cost-effective options for landowners. Her work, centered on agriculture, addresses nitrate pollution in Iowa's waterways. From initial layouts to final designs, Erin ensures projects move swiftly from concept to implementation.



### Allisen Freihage - Conservation Planner, Dubuque County Watersheds

Allisen works directly with Dubuque County farmers writing conservation plans designed to improve water quality and reduce soil erosion. She administers the group's educational outreach program and assists with field day and conference planning. She also assists in the creation and promotion of conservation programs within the county and acts as secretary of the Dubuque Farmer to Farmer group. In her free time, she is an avid birder and concert goer.



### Scott Hendricks - Conservation Agronomist, Dubuque County Watersheds

Scott works with Dubuque County farmers to identify and implement conservation practices that benefit their bottom line and the county's watersheds. His work focuses on soil health and helping farmers improve their return-on-investment. He also helps implement conservation practices with a renter on his family farm near Dubuque, where he also enjoys hunting and fishing. Scott also loves to travel, hike, and camp.



### Mike Kinney - District Administrator, Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

Mike grew up on a Wisconsin dairy farm near Lake Superior. He completed a degree in geology, served in the US Navy, conducted research for NASA on drilling core samples on Mars, taught at the University of Agriculture in Prague, Czech Republic, and helped lead a research team to Lake Baikal in Russia. After receiving an MS in Water Resources Management, he has spent 30 years in watershed management work, currently residing in Forest Lake, Minnesota, while managing a small farm across the St. Croix River in Wisconsin.



### Serge Koenig - Conservation Analyst, Sauk County Land Resources and Environment

Serge has been a Sauk County natural resource professional for over thirty years. He has a Watershed Management degree with a Soils minor from University of Wisconsin Stevens Point. Serge has been working with landowners and various organizations in Sauk County to sustain and improve its natural resources. He is a tireless advocate of managed rotational grazing as a tool for regenerating our soils, water and human resources. In his free time, he loves spending time with his family gardening, traveling, hiking, camping, fishing, hunting and coaching.



### John Meyer - Farmer, Olmstead County, MN

John and his wife, Linda, own and operate Rock Dell Forage Farms in Stewartville, MN. Originally a yield-chasing row crop operation, their regenerative farming journey started with no-till in 2012, followed by cover cropping and "planting green", and now intensive rotationally grazing marketed direct-to-consumer as 100% grass-fed beef. John has designed watering systems, fencing, and cattle feeding and handling equipment. He is a board member for Minnesota Grazing Lands Conservation Association and an active mentor-member with the Minnesota Soil Health Coalition.



### Kelsey Ryan, Ph.D. - Senior Manager of Environmental Sustainability, Nestlé Purina

Kelsey is a food and nutrition professional with experience in research, product development, operations, nutrition, and sustainability. At Nestlé Purina North America, she leads ingredient strategy to promote a resilient food system. She drives progress on environmental sustainability by supporting work on nature, regenerative agriculture, and emissions reduction in the value chain, considering future product and supply needs. Previously, she contributed to the public sector, providing technical leadership on international food assistance products.



### Rod Snyder - Principal & Founder, Junction Strategies, LLC

Rod is the principal and founder of Junction Strategies, a consulting firm focused on agriculture, climate, and environmental policy, as well as supply chain sustainability initiatives. He served as Senior Advisor for Agriculture to the Administrator of the EPA during the Biden-Harris Administration and was named the first director of the EPA's Office of Agriculture and Rural Affairs in 2024. Previously, he was president of Field to Market and co-founded the Sustainable Agriculture Summit. Rod lives on his family farm in West Virginia.



### Joe Stuckel - Farmer, Iroquois County, IL

Joe farms along with his wife Amber and their six children. They are first-generation farmers, raising corn, soybeans, and cattle. Joe has used cover crops, strip-till/no-till, and adaptive nutrient management since he began farming seven years ago. He also has a seed dealership, and seeds cover crops for many of his neighbors. Joe also works with American Farmland Trust to support farmer-led groups in nearby watersheds.



## **Helen VanBeck - Midwest Sr. Program Manager, American Farmland Trust**

Helen works with partners across Illinois to advance conservation practices that build soil health, improve water quality, and support climate resiliency. She provides leadership to AFT's Farmer Led Advances in Soil Health (FLASH) initiative, serves as the manager of the Illinois Sustainable Ag Partnership, and sits on the Steering Committee for Illinois Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources (STAR). Helen earned her Bachelor of Science in environmental policy with an emphasis in sustainable agriculture from the University of California, Davis.



## **Tim Welsh - Farmer, Allamakee County, IA**

Tim operates a farm in northeast Iowa settled by his great-grandparents in the 1870s. While living and working in Thailand since 1987, he rented the land to neighbors raising corn and soybeans, hay, and cattle. Since the pandemic, he has focused on transitioning the farm to custom-grazing on permanent pasture, cover crops, and Kernza while adding small grains and converting more tillable acres to pasture. He and his wife, Nida, and their three children enjoy the farm, travel, and outdoor sports.



## **Darren Yanke - Farmer, Sauk County, WI**

Darren and his family have operated Echo-Y Farms in Loganville, WI, for four generations. They grow grass-fed beef and practice a diverse crop rotation that includes corn, soybeans, winter wheat, alfalfa, and 300 acres of perennial pastures. Darren is an active member of the producer-led watershed group, Sauk Soil and Water Improvement Group (SSWIG), and farmers in his watershed recognize him as the local expert for cover crop "cocktail" recipes.

## **Optional Tours**



### **Baraboo River Restoration Walking Tour**

In 2001, Sand County Foundation and public and private sector partners completed a six-year dam removal effort that resulted in the Baraboo River running unimpeded for the first time in 150 years. Join us on a 1/2 mile walking tour to learn about the successful partnerships leading to this historic river restoration project.



### **Bula's Pleasant Valley Farm Tour**

Bula's Pleasant Valley Farm is a sustainably operated 160-acre homestead nestled in the scenic bluffs of Baraboo, Wisconsin. Established in 1993 by Ron and Maureen Bula, the farm was born from a desire to provide high-quality, transparently grown food for their family and community.

Today, the farm prioritizes regenerative agriculture and soil health, raising cattle, sheep, pigs, and poultry primarily on perennial pastures and diverse crop rotations. Through intensive rotational grazing and thoughtful soil management, the Bulas prioritize land conservation and animal welfare. We invite you to explore this thriving landscape where healthy food and environmental stewardship go hand in hand. To learn more, visit [bulasplesantvalleyfarm.com](http://bulasplesantvalleyfarm.com)

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## Advisory Team:

**Chuck Brandel**, ISG, Inc.

**Catherine DeLong**, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

**Haley Diem**, Sand County Foundation

**Erin Dwenger**, ISG, Inc.

**Craig Ficenec**, Sand County Foundation

**Jenny Seifert**, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension

**Haleigh Summers**, Sand County Foundation

**Todd Sutphin**, Iowa Soybean Association

**Maria Teresa Tancredi**, Conservation Technology Innovation Center (CTIC)