

**American Water Resources Association annual conference summary**

November 8-10, 2020 (virtual)

--Tracy Zayac, Stormwater/Watershed Specialist

I attended the virtual annual American Water Resources Association conference November 8-10, 2021. The conference featured a mix of live panel and discussion/Q&A sessions, traditional technical presentations, a poster session, virtual field trips, and live virtual “engagement” sessions.

This was one of those conferences where they had scheduled so many good topical sessions that I had a hard time choosing and wanted to participate in multiple sessions at once. Always a nice problem to have at any conference. Following are some highlights from selected sessions.

**Monday, November 8****“Impacts of Human Behavior and Education on Utilization of Water Resources”**

- We have a lack of post-BMP studies to understand success stories.
  - Not enough data to model effects of BMPs at a watershed scale
  - Don’t know how generalizable results from a given study may be to other watersheds with differing circumstances
- The strongest data in the world don’t necessarily change the tendency toward emotional decision-making.

**“Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion & Water Resources”**

- Many, if not most, conversations about water (or any technical topic, really) show a disconnect between scientists and interested persons
  - This can be both a language and a data-literacy problem.
  - See attached screenshots from one presentation
- The pandemic has created both challenges and opportunities
  - Example: poor connectivity excludes marginalized and rural/remote folks AND has created a more horizontal dialogue structure for new voices to participate
- Consider impacts of each line item of a project and the specific groups affected, rather than doing just one blanket analysis
- Including underrepresented groups doesn’t mean including just anyone from that group—important to have the actual voices relevant to the specific dialogue participating
- Also important to think about age diversity in dialogue participation

**Tuesday, November 9****“Water Wars: What are they good for? Eastern US Topics”**

- Any dialogue process about water sharing involves a political solution
- East is starting to wake up to the need to look at groundwater use, but they’re not yet having conversations about management, especially at the interstate level
  - River basin commissions (an existing framework for interstate surface-water management) could be a venue for this work

- Water quantity and quality are inextricably linked, and you can't really untangle them, in terms of effective water management
  - \*Poor quality water isn't actually a usable/available quantity of water\*

#### “Water Wars: What are they good for? Western US Topics”

- Approach through appreciative inquiry (David Cooperrider at Case Western) - five key principles:
  - Words create worlds
  - Inquiry creates change
  - We can choose what we study
  - Images inspire action
  - Positive questions lead to positive change
- No such thing as “fixing water”
- Fun fact from this session! The word “stakeholder” dates from the era of Manifest Destiny and is, thus, a deeply problematic term to use in discussions that are supposed to be including diverse voices, especially native and indigenous ones. Time to retire that word and choose one without colonialist and genocidal baggage attached.

#### “Streamflow and Stream Restoration”

- Study of long-term (>10 years out) effectiveness of stream restoration project on water-quality improvement
  - Both urban and periurban projects (not unlike some of our projects around Lincoln)
  - Generally saw a decrease in nutrients, but depended on source of nutrients and seasonality
  - Noted that bank stabilization projects don't really help with phosphorus reduction
  - Nutrient levels are affected by amount of groundwater baseflow present in stream
  - Vegetated banks had a positive effect on nitrogen and sediment levels

#### **Wednesday, November 10**

#### “Revolution, Not Evolution: How do we get lasting change while ensuring productive agriculture and good water quality?”

- Projects that have multiple benefits let you tell a better story to get broader support for accomplishing your goals
- Need targeted technical assistance to different folks—farm visits and tailored messages vs waiting for folks to come to your office
- Need to understand how farmer lives and works to start getting at behavior change
  - Moving the needle isn't just about doing more I&E
- If markets for environmental credits take off, buyers will expect accountability
  - Need robust, scientifically defensible implementation of practices, with measurable effects—not currently available with existing data/studies
  - Farmers also just want to know that what they're doing matters/has had an effect

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
REPORT TO THE  
LOWER PLATTE SOUTH NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT  
December 15, 2021**

**PERSONNEL:**

- USDA Service Center Operations – The Lancaster and Cass County Service Centers continue to be closed to walk-in customers. Producers may contact their local office to make arrangements for an appointment, or to conduct business by alternate means, such as over the phone, electronically, or by mail.

**NRD LAND TREATMENT:**

- The Conservation/Resources Technicians are very busy designing and staking conservation practices for construction. Excellent weather conditions have allowed staff to layout the following number of projects:
  - Lancaster County – 22 projects
  - Cass County – 31
- We have finished taking applications for the LPSNRD Cover Crop Program applications. We have received 51 applications for a total of \$103,385. Staff will continue to verify planting and certify applications for payment once the cover crop is termination in April/May.

**USDA PROGRAMS:**

- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) - Staff is currently working on FY22 CSP renewal obligations. Lancaster County received one contract for approximately \$40,000.
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – Staff is currently busy assessing and ranking EQIP application for FY22 contract approval. The next month will be spent meeting with producers to develop conservation plan and cost estimates. The following number of applications are being processed:
  - Lancaster County – 28 applications
  - Cass County – 32

**UPCOMING EVENTS:**

**CY21 Payment Requests Due – December 15<sup>th</sup>**  
**Christmas Day – December 25<sup>th</sup>**  
**New Year's Day – January 1<sup>st</sup>**  
**FY22 CSP & EQIP Application Deadline – November 17<sup>th</sup>**

***Cory Schmidt - District Conservationist***