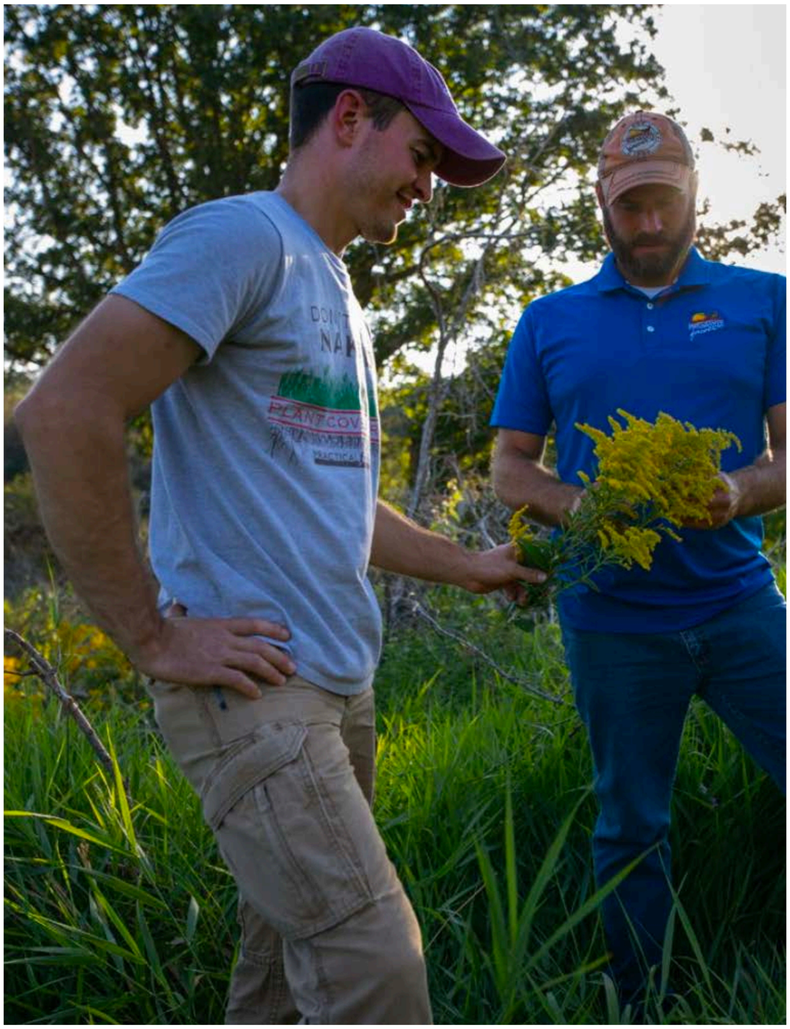

LANDOWNER/ PRACTITIONER FORUM: Notes from a conservation trust-building event

2022 Report

REPORT OF THE FIRST
PRIVATE LANDOWNER/CONSERVATION PRACTITIONER FORUM
HELD IN KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI JULY 12-13, 2022

Contents

Landowner/Practitioner cover photos from
Rachel Bush precision ag presentation at Forum

Forum participant event photos by Planning Team

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Introduction

To both landowners and practitioners partnering to achieve voluntary conservation on private lands, it is clear that there is a foundational process for establishing good working relationships. This process builds trust and effective, transparent communication between individuals from different perspectives. Planning for this forum originated prior to the onset of the Covid pandemic based on the premise that building a community of practice for voluntary, partnership-based conservation on private lands could support more and more effective outcomes on-the-ground in working landscapes.

Developing trust and understanding is required prior to any cooperative private lands conservation action. This is the mostly unspoken, unrecognized, and unaddressed reality that private lands practitioners and landowners work through every day. Practitioners, administrators, and landowner partners rarely talk about this reality and associated skill set directly. Yet in planning and holding this gathering, it was confirmed that those engaged in this work, regardless of perspective, are hungry for experiences that can help with understanding and successfully navigating this foundational process! Participants appreciated the chance to talk about their individual challenges, opportunities, and questions with others who are a part of the practice of voluntary conservation, regardless of perspective.

This forum was organized by members of the **North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) Private and Working Lands (PWL) Subcommittee** and hosted by the **Missouri Department of Conservation** in partnership with **American Bird Conservancy**.

The **U.S. NABCI Committee** facilitates collaborative partnerships that advance biological, social, and scientific priorities for North American bird conservation. The PWL Subcommittee works with partners to identify opportunities to integrate bird conservation priorities into private lands conservation efforts.

> Developing trust and understanding is required prior to any cooperative private lands conservation action. This is the mostly unspoken, unrecognized, and unaddressed reality that private lands practitioners and landowners work through every day.

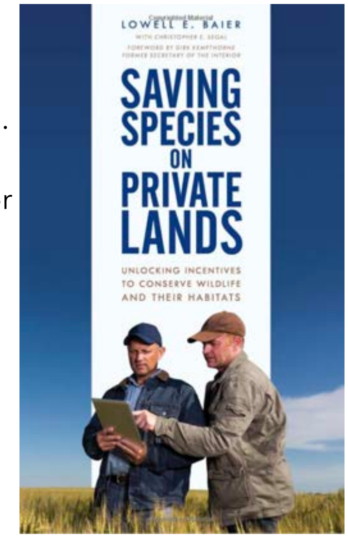
The goal of this workshop was to address this foundational relationship-building process and to begin a conversation that we hope will lead to improved understanding, resources, training, and support for those working to achieve conservation on private lands. In particular, organizers believe that addressing the capacity needs of private lands staff (local, state, federal, nonprofit or otherwise) for this work is essential. This was an initial effort to focus on these types of issues, which it turns out can be a struggle for many whose education, training, and experience has been largely technical. Based on the response to this over-subscribed event and feedback from participants, we anticipate future events will be developed at various locations around the country.

Our ambition was to develop a forum to address the following topics:

- Training opportunities focused on such topics as holistic planning (e.g., watershed, whole system), building successful and trusting relationships with landowners, and creating effective landowner outreach and education strategies
- Collaborative sessions with private landowners and agency staff

- ✦ Networking sessions to facilitate partnership development, synergy, and a broader understanding regarding social, interpersonal, and economic aspects of habitat conservation delivery
- ✦ Strategy development for working with groups of landowners and partner organizations (local, state, federal, nonprofit) to achieve landscape-level conservation impact

Forum Organization



The forum began with an opening reception, which was remotely attended by Lowell Baier, author of ***Saving Species on Private Lands: Unlocking Incentives to Conserve Wildlife and Their Habitats*** and his colleague and co-author Chris Segal. All forum attendees received a copy of his book as well as the benefit of his years of working on landowner and partner relationships, as Mr. Baier set the agenda for the 2-day meeting. The gist of his message to participants was "Successful conservation is all about people."

Day 1 of the forum was opened with a welcome from Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Missouri State Conservationist Scott Edwards and opening remarks from Partnerscapes. The forum was organized to provide an intermingling of presentations, panel discussions, and smaller breakout group discussions covering the six key topics listed below. Day 1 provided an overview, presentations, and landowner/practitioner panels on the topics. Day 2 provided an opportunity for all participants to engage in concurrent classroom-style breakout groups featuring the same themes and topics as day 1 with the goals of learning more on each topic and developing ideas for products, training, resources, and mentoring. The meeting concluded with discussions about suggestions for how to improve future meetings, as well as the development of a follow-up survey of participants to gain their insights and feedback.

Forum topics

1. Building Relationships
2. Precision Agriculture*
3. Conservation Projects - Getting to Yes: Landowner & Practitioner panel
4. Successful Conservation Planning: Landowner & Practitioner panel
5. Human Dimensions*
6. Working at Effective Scales*

"Conservation moves at the speed of trust."

Each topic with an asterisk above included in-depth information on specialized topics, which we present as stand-alone summaries in this report. We found, however, that the discussions and points made in the remaining topics (numbers 1, 3, and 4) were very similar, with much overlap in the points made. (The Getting to Yes session was based in part on the **book by the same name** about the art of persuasion.) For this reason, we have combined the summary of these topics into one section, which follows.

Communication, Relationship Building, and Trust

This is a combined topic, which includes information from a discussion of Building Relationships, as well as two Landowner/Practitioner panel discussions on "Getting to Yes" and "Successful Conservation Planning." These discussions emphasized that the same basic principles (listening, establishing trust, meeting people where they are, not making assumptions about motivations, etc.) apply, regardless of the audience. One attendee with experience working with Native landowners said he'd had success with that approach, and none of his clients expected perfect knowledge about their culture. This section has been organized according to common themes that arose during all three of these sessions.

> "I hope you feel good about what you do because you have a good job," - said by a private landowner to a conservation practitioner.

Practitioner Self-Knowledge

It's important to be aware of your own expectations and desires before going into a meeting or a new community. Practitioners are often working to implement 1- to 3-year grants with acreage deliverables, yet it can take multiple years to build trust in a community. This can create time conflicts and invites you to put pressure on yourself. However, you don't want your own needs to interfere with your relationship building. This can be a real challenge.

- Think of your job first as building relationships, second as delivering programs.
- Be honest with yourself and others, and ask for help from local landowners if you need it.
- It's important to understand and own your baggage, or the baggage your organization/partners come with.
- Acknowledge your own bias(es).
- Keep in mind that a first visit might take a full day, and you might not have a concrete plan by the end of that day.
- Create the vibe that you want to learn from landowners by actually learning!
- If necessary, there are trainings on how to "read" people, which can be hard for some. (The "University of YouTube")
- Don't make assumptions about generational preferences, just ask.
- Some language common to academia may be concerning to some landowners (e.g., "regime," "protect," "defend the core")
- Under-promise and over-deliver.
- Realize that you won't be able to work with everyone.
- Focus on quality over quantity of conservation plans.
- Not every meeting with a landowner needs to be about enrolling in a program or spending money.

- Acknowledge that you will fail sometimes. Learn from it and try again.
- Be aware that landowners may tell you what they think you want to hear.
- Don't think about deliverables while meeting with landowners; concentrate on listening and understanding.
- Straightforwardness and honesty are always key.
- Never underestimate the value of the relationships you build—they may come in handy later or in different situations.

Rancher by Jeremy Roberts, Conservation Media

Tips on Talking to A Rancher or Landowner for the First Time

Always ask about the ranch history!

Three neutral topics shared by Kansas landowner Bill Sproul:
- ✦ Weather
- ✦ Plants and invasive species
- ✦ Wildlife (except threatened and endangered species)

"What are your goals and objectives" is not a good question, rather, ask
"Why do you own your land?"

Building Trust

Building trust is your long-term goal, so focus on developing trust with the landowner. This will not happen on the first meeting, and it requires follow through. Be sure to set yourself up for success on your first visit: Show up early, do your research ahead of time, and have maps!

- Show up on time.
- Never go to a meeting without a soils map.
- Remove your sunglasses.
- Make eye contact when talking face to face.
- Be humble.
- Be honest and transparent.
- Call when you say you will.
- Do a tour of the property early in the visit.
- Get the landowner/manager talking and just listen.
- Complaints are good intel.
- Always try and answer questions, but not at the expense of providing bad information. A delayed answer is okay as long as it is correct. Don't guess.
- Be patient, let the landowner set the pace for their process.

Relying on the Expertise of Landowners

- ✦ Development of programs shouldn't take place without the input of prospective participants.
- ✦ Find the landowner thought leaders and early adopters sometimes described as "bell cows" or "lead mules."
- ✦ Consider landowner-led trainings.
- ✦ Have meetings where few practitioners and many ranchers attend, making space for opinions and expressions of need (i.e., not dominated by science)

Community Conservation

Conservation in rural areas cannot be done in isolation from the community in which it occurs. The first step in working in new communities is to build trust. A good rule of thumb is it takes a year to build trust in a community. How do you build trust? Engage in community: Landowners learn and inquire about programs at landowner workshops, meetings, and through word of mouth. Go to community events, show your commitment and interest.

- Involve all family members and anyone else who has an interest in the property.
- Visit the schools! Children come home to the ranch and tell their parents and grandparents.
- Community organizations tend to start around an issue
- Begin by hosting a meeting about the issue.
- When living in rural communities, even when off work, always represent the brand. Act accordingly.

Community tent from T. J. Walker & Grotelueschen effective scales presentation at Forum

"People and communities define conservation. It is critical that landowners reach out to state and federal agencies to network and find common ground and durable solutions to resource and community issues. The value and sustainability of working lands is the responsibility of us all." - Jim Stone, Partnerscapes Chair, Rolling Stone Ranch, Montana

Working with Absentee Landowners

How you interact with absentee landowners will depend on the situation. Some are engaged with their land and just live elsewhere. Others are not engaged and your key contact may be the lessee/renter/tenant farmer. This requires more hand-holding, and the process of trust building may be with the land manager and not the owner.

- If many of the absentee landowners live in a certain city, it could be possible to hold a meeting or workshop in their city and send a direct mailing invite. During the meeting you can offer to meet on-site with them and their tenant farmer.
- Contact both the operator (tenant/lessee) and the landowner.
- Relationships can be tricky, but if it's a lessee, you need to have the owner on board. In general, follow the recommendations of the tenant.
- It's often the case that absentee landowners are trying to maximize profitability, but don't make assumptions!
- Many recreational landowners are absentee.
- Recreational/absentee landowners can sometimes be easier to connect with and more eager, but they often they require more legwork since they don't live and work on-site.
- If working with the state and pursuing Walk-In Areas (WIAs), these pair well with CRP and can mean more property vigilance from hunters.

Partner Relations

- Determine the preferred/most effective method of communication.
- Communicate/coordinate with partners beyond individual projects.
- Local realtors know who's buying what and why; they may appreciate the chance to pass along information about organizations that can help.

A Special Case:
Dealing with Broken Relationships
(between partners or with landowners)

- Listen.
- Acknowledge the issue(s).
- If assigning blame, blame the program or process, not a person or partner!
- Express empathy; emphasize that you are here to help and try to resolve the issue.

Successful Conservation Planning

Developing a conservation plan is usually the first step in providing conservation assistance to a landowner. The process is dependent on good, two-way communication, beginning with an evaluation of the landowner's needs and wishes for his or her property. The next ingredient is understanding what types of programs and stewardship activities could actually work on a specific landowner's operation. This involves the following:

- Know the landowner's capabilities. Will this person be able to implement practices?
    - Finances
    - Equipment
    - Manpower.
    - Understanding of details
    - Time.
- Make sure the landowner understands all the acronyms and programs.
    - Expected inputs.
    - Aesthetics.
    - Outcomes.
- Match landowner goals with conservation/access program options and wildlife habitat needs.
- If you're feeling resistance to something and you don't know where it's coming from, ask older folks, either more tenured practitioners or landowners with whom you have a relationship.
- Look for an overlap in conservation and management interests. (Flexibility of programs is important.)
- Start small so you can show success early.
- It's OK to refer producers to other practitioners. Sometimes you are not the right fit. Understanding other organization/agency programs is helpful.
- Always visit the exact site and confirm its condition before and after treatment.

Presentations, landowner panels, and break-out groups resulted in advice coming from both landowners and conservation practitioners, making it clear that both sides seek common ground, but in different ways.

Beginning *New* Relationships

- Drive by and introduce yourself (a new type of cold call). Do *not* invite yourself onto their property. Possibly ask if they are interested in talking over a cup of coffee about a new program to help increase their profitability. Ask where would they like to meet.
- You may need to use a different approach for production landowners vs. recreational landowners.
- Find out what the landowner wants and their expectations for their land: this is specific to each individual. Match responses to their expressed desires.

Practitioner Perspectives

Practitioners shared their perspectives on determining landowner objectives and capabilities:

- One mold doesn't fit all: career farmers/ranchers/producers and recreational farmers/absentee landowners are two very different groups.
- Be sure to engage with all property owners, family members, shareholders, and interests if possible.
- Develop plans landowners will use.
- Understand how your program's goals overlap with those of the producer.
    - Planning involves empathy, listening, and compromise.
    - Develop a prescription specifically designed for that property.
- Balance the desired conservation objectives with the needs, desires, and resources of the landowner.
- Some landowners like to try new techniques, experiment, and see how something works.
- Get a feel for the comfort level of implementation before diving into a practice with a producer.
- For landowners who are not very communicative, consider using newsletters or a management calendar.
- Hunting and fishing recreation opportunities are often a common interest, even a secondary management goal for producers.
- Listen to underserved populations.
- Many producers would prefer to let their work show, rather than helping you reach out to their neighbors. Partially, this is a matter of privacy, and partially this is a matter of "if it doesn't work out."
- Keep in mind producers may refer only their most interested neighbors.
- Showcase uniqueness and successes. Share stories with state agriculture (ag) magazines, but make sure journals don't change the intent or the story. Showcase multigenerational farms/ranches.

Producer Perspectives

Producers shared their perspectives to help conservation practitioners better understand how to build productive relationships.

- Return phone calls, ask how things are going.
- Have subtle discussions on common interests to begin building a relationship. More coffee visits = more success.
- Don’t rush unless the producer is rushed for time. Try and read the situation.
- Don’t make assumptions.
- Involve the whole family.
- Help with first attempts at difficult practices such as prescribed burns.
- Try to give enthusiastic producers something they can do now.
- It might be best to try something small/easy/affordable and build up to bigger projects over time.
- Don’t try to do everything at once!
- Some landowners start out incentive-based, some landowners are more community-based.
- Maybe a landowner wants technical assistance, advice, your friendship, or financial incentives. All can contribute to conservation work now or later. Figure that out what the landowner wants or find a way to ask.

Safety Resources for Practitioners

There are a variety of practices that various conservation offices have put in place to help ensure the safety of their staff, and in particular to help female practitioners feel safe alone with male landowners. These include:

- Staff security.
- The use of GPS for safety tracking.
- Informing partners where, when, and how to contact you.
- Partnering up on site visits.
- When meeting with landowners, inviting other family members, then giving them time to decide. Don’t ask them to hop in the truck and drive off to the back 40!
- Making multiple pre-qualifying calls before the site visit if there are concerns.
- Developing or using a landowner database with notations (primarily for successive staff or to note when females need to be aware).
- Noting areas within counties that should be avoided when traveling alone.

Sage Grouse meeting by Scott Root, Utah DWR-IMWJV

Customer Service for Landowners

Be ***respectful*** by:

- Taking your sunglasses off
- Asking about communication methods and time preferences
- Knowing your local ag calendar so that you know when landowners are busiest
- Being available and responsive within an acceptable timeframe
- Being flexible
- Respecting landowners' property
- Being professional: admitting when you don't know the answer, then finding it and reaching back out.
- Sharing your expertise: Landowners want to learn new things from biologists
- Being highly respectful of landowner knowledge about their land (you can learn a lot!)
- Respecting their concerns or wants
- Thanking landowners/managers for their time, concern, action

The Importance of Listening

Shared by a Missouri Dept. of Conservation private lands conservation staffer with fire training.

"I was given the task to contain a wildfire on USFS land in Montana, and because of challenges associated with fuels and topography the only feasible way to contain the fire was to put in lines at the toe slopes of the local mountain range on private land. Landowners exhibited anti-government sentiment, plus I was from out-of-state, and they were in a severe drought.

"My first step was to meet with the landowners. It was very clear that they were not happy. They were concerned about losing their homes, feeding their livestock, and concerned about invasive species coming in any time the soil is disturbed. It was clear that the plan that I was given was not going to be acceptable to the landowners.

"I spent the next couple days hiking with aerial photos and topo maps and finally settled on a fire line location that kept the line in the woods at the toe of the slope and took advantage of an old road system complex that stayed out of the heavy fuel loads present on the USFS lands.

"I met with the landowners again and laid out my proposed plan. They knew that I had listened to their concerns, which were reflected in my plan. I earned their trust and they backed the plan 100%. We put the plan in place with daily communication with the landowners. The fire was contained, and the landowners didn't lose any additional land or any forage.

"What did I learn?
The importance of listening.
The importance of empathy.
The importance of compromise.
The importance of good communication."

Learn the Basics!

When conservation practitioners in a working landscape do not come from an agriculture background, it's necessary to learn basic production agriculture!

- NRCS and University Agricultural Extensions are great learning resources for ag topics, as well as just asking the producer and showing interest in what they do. It is a mistake to pretend to know about any topic just to make conversation with producers!
- Learn the ins and outs of programs, especially EQIP.
- Attend local workshops sponsored by the ag community.
- Offer on-farm help.
- Offer assistance to state and federal partners on their managed lands. You may have opportunities to do this within your current agency or organization.

Reaching Landowners Who Do Not Reach Out

Sometimes you will want to work with landowners as part of a focal area or because of their influence in the community. If they don't come to you, try these techniques:

- Direct mailings are a tried and true method that works best early on in a private land effort. Depending on the state, you can get mailing addresses and current landowners, regardless of geography.
- Use partners that might have a connection with local landowners such as Cattleman's Associations, University Extension, farmer cooperatives, etc. Hold a joint workshop with them.
- Ask a partner or game warden who might have a personal connection if they would help set up an in-person meeting to begin the conversation.
- Begin conversations at the gas station, hardware store, local coffee shop, maybe pick up the phone.
- Carry literature with you and have it on hand.
- Get out in the community. Just having someone see your face at an event is a contact. You never know who you're talking to and who they may talk to.
- Go to the schools.

Once you have established a lot of contacts, you have to prioritize and triage.

- It takes a couple of years on the job to reach this point.
- A rule of thumb is it takes 2 to 5 years of relationship building before asking a producer to participate in larger outreach efforts.
- Try and touch base even when busy.
- Coordinate with partners to prevent landowner fatigue from too many people "knocking on the door."

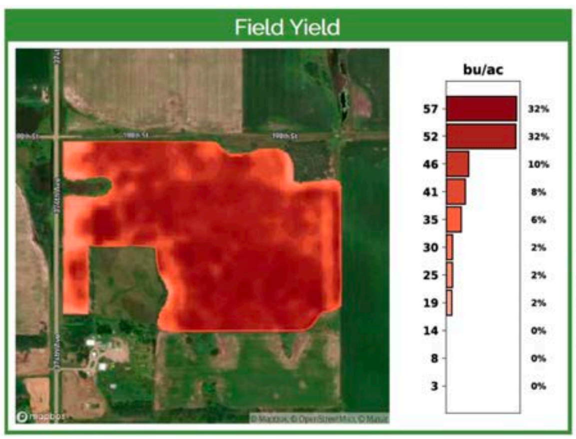
Ring-necked Pheasant from Rachel Bush precision ag presentation at Forum

Precision Agriculture

Precision agriculture originated with technological advances in the 1990s, and in recent years it has achieved enough attention and acceptance to be called a "movement." Precision agriculture is about identifying profitable solutions to conservation problems. Precision agriculture advocates are working to break down the perception that conservation is costly (see Ranjan et al. 2019 paper). Research suggests that on average, 20% of a farm's cropland acres lose money, 20% break even, and 60% turn a profit. Survey results also suggest that landowners trust family and farm input dealers the most when making operational decisions, while conservation staff tend to be the least trusted sources of information. For these reasons, the 5 to 20% of average farm ground that is unprofitable presents opportunities for conservation practitioners who can assist farmers by helping them to reconfigure their operation to save money (or increase current profits). For example, when a portion of a cropped field does not grow well, it loses money. By removing the production from that area, seeding to perennial cover, and grazing it, the field profit can be increased. Currently, the highest adoption of precision ag is in corn and soybeans, and to a lesser degree in small grains.

Profit, Loss & Data

Because a unique 5 to 20% of almost every farm is not profitable, each farm needs a customized plan for its operation. The conservation practitioner must begin by determining the producer's objectives. The following are tips on how to "make the sale" for conservation.



Parameter	Value
Field Acreage	84.2 ac
Average Yield	49.7 bu/ac
Commodity Price	$14.00
ROI	56.6 %
Production Efficiency	111.9 bu/$1,000
Acreage Opportunity Ratio	7 %
Working Capital Opportunity	$2,720.99
Land Cost	$100.00
Total Expenses	$37,372.65
Total Revenue	$58,536.20
Total Profit	$21,163.56
Profit	$251.37/ac

Calculations of profit and loss must account for crop insurance premiums and potential payouts, as well as ongoing maintenance required if cropland is converted to some other cover type.

- Know your economics! For example, if the operation will involve livestock, know how much a cow costs.
- Crop rows bordering woodlands typically are less productive due to shading and water competition; turning these rows into grassland buffers may help profitability. Some farmers may opt not to enroll buffers into a program so they can use them as turn rows or lure crops to reduce wildlife damage to adjacent crops.
- By removing the lowest-yielding portions of a field from production, the field's increase in average production history (APH) can also reduce crop insurance premiums on the remaining acres.

Because a unique 5 to 20% of almost every farm is not profitable, each farm needs a customized plan for its operation.

Planning for precision agriculture requires data, and precision ag data availability may be low in some areas. Alternatives to consider include:

- Farmers often have precision ag software on their machinery; however, they need to trust you to give it to you. (This technology is being adopted at varying rates.)
- Many farmers collect yield data but some don't. For those that don't, most land grant universities have calculators available to estimate average input costs and yields. Free satellite data (Normalized Difference Vegetation Index or NDVI) is also available, which can help identify less productive areas of fields. You can also actually see problems through NDVI Imagery layers.
- Sometimes you see issues from an aerial photograph, even without precision ag data (which the practitioner acquires from the producer).

Profitable Conservation Solutions

Minnesota

	Actual Production	With CRP
Conservation Acres	0 Ac.	25.0 Ac
Field Average Yield	145 bu/Ac	157 bu/Ac
Profit/ Acre	$41.00	$86.00
ROI	6%	14%

Graphics on pp.13, 14 from Rachel Bush precision ag presentation at Forum

Human Dimensions

The human dimensions (HD) of conservation include drivers of behavior: knowledge, real and perceived barriers, awareness of consequences, social norms, and a sense of personal responsibility. Social sciences are not soft science! The social sciences can use models and various methodologies to test assumptions. If you are designing a producer survey, it's a good idea to reach out and consult with a social scientist.

Research indicates that an increase in age generally is correlated with a decrease in adoption of conservation practices. Research also indicates that more education is correlated with an increase in adoption of new practices. Self-identification by landowners is a good precursor to adoption. For example, ranchers are more likely to adopt practices if they self-identify an issue that a practice will address.

While Information/awareness can be an entry-level variable for behavior change, "education" may not in and of itself lead to the behavior changes desired. Instead, frame program objectives as 1) what do you want the audience to know, 2) what do you want them to feel, and 3) what do you want them to do? From the audience (landowner) perspective, objectives can be framed around "show me," "help me," or "make me" categories. The following factors included in outreach programs can increase the likelihood of a desired behavior/behavior change:

- Targeted messaging to align with specific attitudes, beliefs, and values of the target audience
- A focus on removing barriers
- Building skills and experiences
- Leveraging existing social norms (as appropriate)

Characteristics of conservation practices themselves that can influence adoption include:

- Relative advantage to the operation
- Complexity
- Compatibility with current management
- Observability of both problem and treatment
- Trialability
- Risk

Graphics on pp. 15, 16 from K. Rajala and S. Westlake human dimensions presentation at Forum

Humans are typically portrayed as antagonists in the conservation story. Sometimes we need to reframe that. The social science angle aims to evaluate methods, normalize conservation, and increase adoption rates. Social norms, a personal sense of responsibility, and barriers (financial, social, etc.) all drive behaviors to either adopt or reject conservation practices. For practices to persist, we need positive experiences, compatibility, benefits, and positive social perceptions.

Best Practices/Challenges

Best practices for how to share information and stewardship practices with producers include:

- Use trusted resources.
- Seek key stakeholders' and local leaders' support.
- Check in with partners.
- Be present in the community and follow through with what you say.
- Ensure producers retain as much autonomy and flexibility as possible.

Developing trust takes time, so expect and plan for a long-term process. It's also important to realize that trust should go both ways. In addition to relationship and trust building ideas addressed in Part II, consider the following.

Best practices for building trust, building on social norms, and removing barriers include:

- Try to find common ground with each potential contact.
- Use landowner-led events with "exclusive" invitation lists to reach potential influencers (the "bell-cow" landowners, i.e., community leaders).
- Offer event participants a free meal.
- Hold events where meals are already being served ("café talks").
- Use NGO banquets and events to expand social networks and find conservation-minded landowners.
- Printed material should be easy to read in large print and with simple messages.
- Use personal social media accounts rather than institutional ones to increase authenticity.
- Create partnerships with USDA that allow access to their landowner mailing lists.

- A little mystery can spark curiosity (the "Wall Drug" billboards are an example), but also confusion (an agency's "Got Quail?" promotion made some believe they were giving away quail).
- Don't confuse the loudest or most talkative participant for the most influential.
- Depending on the audience, strategically leave out wildlife-related messages and play up others (e.g., economic advantages, other resource benefits) that are most relevant to the audience.
- Showcase examples of success.
- Volunteer to help a landowner with work if you are comfortable doing so, but be cautious about helping some and not others.

> "Successful outreach means targeted messaging using trusted sources and networks."

Challenges in conducting outreach and building trust include:

- It's hard to reach new people; sometimes the same 10 people show up at every event.
- "Conservation fatigue" can occur in high-priority landscapes where multiple agencies and organizations are working.
- It's often necessary to develop material that is relevant to multiple landowner types (absentee, non-resident, owner-operators, corporate, etc.)
- Conflicts or bad decisions in the past can influence relationships and perceptions for many years afterward.
- Landowners may be "shopping" for better deals, or biologists/agencies may provide contradictory information.
- Reaching landowners who are strictly money-focused with programs that are funding-starved and/or inflexible can lead to frustration.
- Strategies to avoid biologist burn-out are needed, especially when adjacent open positions cause a higher workload.

Note that HD references are linked in the bibliography of this report. Additional HD Resources include the (a) **Conservation Social Sciences Community Network**, which can help to find HD specialists in your area, and (b) the Human Dimensions Foundations of Natural Resource Conservation introductory training provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, open to a variety of resource professionals.

Landowner and NRCS by USDA

Working at Effective Scales

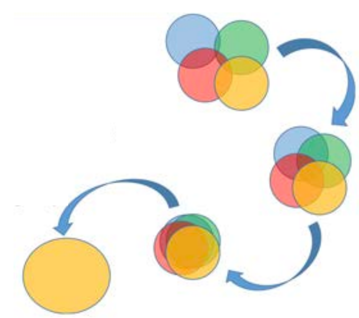
Working at effective scales entails consideration of the scale and duration of private land conservation, including access, planning, and funding. It often means the difference between working on individual projects vs. working at a landscape scale, across many ownerships and jurisdictions. Accomplishing conservation at a landscape scale means encouraging landowners and neighbors to work with each other to achieve objectives together.

Examples of at least four different landscape scale projects were presented, including (a) how "the science" was tied into the effort in identification of potential areas to work, (b) real or anticipated "outcomes," (c) what types of monitoring or research was conducted, and (d) what types of conservation work was/will be implemented and how. Also discussed were the landowner roles.

A private landowner panel discussed their own land management stories. The Loess Canyons Rangeland Alliance (LCRA) was highlighted as a success story (see LCRA story, next page), and the panel detailed its functions, how the community works together across multiple generations, as well as the structure, function, and teamwork of the LCRA on prescribed burns. It was the landowners who made the Loess Canyons story the success that it is today. (It will be the landowners that produce the as-of-yet unwritten Great Plains Grassland Initiative story as well as other initiatives.)

> "If you have an endangered species on your land — you're doing something right."

To learn from the LCRA example, we must ask ourselves, why is the Loess Canyons program succeeding? Conservation is a long haul: It's best to start slowly to turn overlapping visions into fully shared visions, and keep in mind efforts are multigenerational. Factors contributing to LCRA success include:



Graphics on pp. 18 & 20 from T.J. Walker & Grotelueschen effective scales presentation at Forum

- A shared "public enemy number 1"–the Eastern Red Cedar (ERC)
- An at-risk species that led to funding opportunities
- Landowners (realizing they had a problem) who wanted to be a part of the solution
- Natural resources professionals who were willing to talk, and more willing to listen
- Landowners providing practitioners with a seat at their table
- Trust, earned and given, in all directions
- The requirement that a landowner be on half of the burns for two years before they get a burn on their own land
- Landowner led, conservation group-supported
- Communication

Community aspects of success were also cited:
- A landowner community that came together over time.
- Natural resources staff became part of that community.
- Being "there" for each other on fire lines (theirs and ours), at LCRA meetings, and even at social events.

Photographs, from top to bottom:
The Loess Valley, Members of the Loess Valley Co-op, the American Burying Beetle from T. J. Walker & Grotelueschen effective scales presentation at Forum

How landowner attitudes toward rare species can change with conservation success

The Loess Canyons Rangeland Alliance didn't form until after a devastating wildfire brought the community together in need of solutions. The historical perspective in the Loess Canyons region was that *trees were good, and fire was bad*. The Loess Canyons Rangeland Alliance (LCRA) story began with a small project by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in the 1990s. TNC helped a landowner conduct a small burn in ~2000 to 2001. Then in 2002, the Gothenburg fire burned approximately 13,000 acres, but it did not burn the small acreage that had previously been burned by TNC! Landowners recognized they had a problem with encroaching cedar and formed the LCRA cooperative in 2002.

To date, landowners of the LCRA have conducted more than 100 burns on over 30,000 acres, in collaboration with over 100 people, and there are now two cooperatives. The cooperatives are approaching 200 project agreements with likely "8 figures" of conservation funding spent, with landowners having matched 25% or more of that. The LCRA has acquired over $1 million in grant funds.

Results include:

- American burying beetles are increasing.
- Grassland birds are increasing.
- Cedar coverage is decreasing—a little.
- A model has been created.

Changes in perception have also occurred. Landowner opinions about American Burying Beetle (ABB) at the start of the LCRA included apathy, concern, and even fear, but now landowners are at least accepting of having ABB on their land if not proud of it.

"If you have an endangered species on your land – you're doing something right," some landowners say. The ABB led to an increase in funding opportunities. The message from practitioners is, "Because of that beetle we have money to help you with cedar removal!"

Landowner Cooperatives

This section highlights landowner cooperatives: how they work and how they can be successfully established. Landowner cooperatives fundamentally must be landowner-led, with practitioners providing a support role.

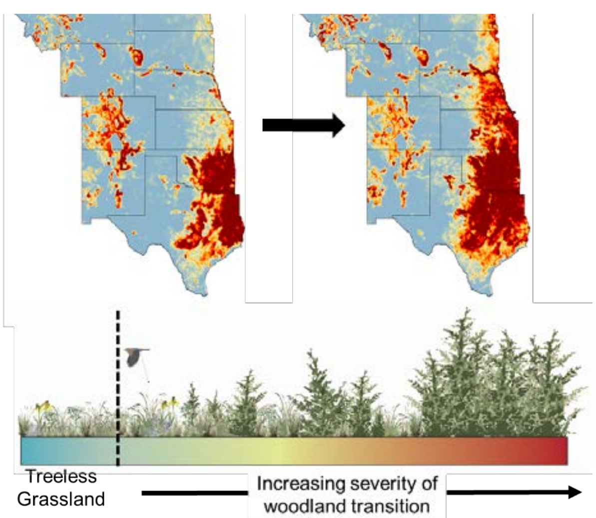
The topic of how to establish landowner cooperatives included a fair amount of questions and answers about how varying cooperatives may function differently (i.e., a Prescribed Burn Association may focus exclusively on prescribed fire while some cooperatives could potentially function in a different way without ever using fire). Quite a bit of energy revolved around the topics of "just getting a couple of neighbors to work together," developing community, how to become a part of the community, and communication and relationship building. Participants stressed to keep the following in mind:

- Don't always call a landowner group a Prescribed Burn Group; it can be more than that.
- If they're branding calves together, they can discuss resource concerns together.
- A 501c organization designation makes it easier to apply for grants; will need bylaws and a structure.
- Cooperatives need equipment, administration, trainings, and incentives assistance.
- Words matter: words such as "grazing regime" or "protect" can be offensive terms to some landowners.

"You have a big job, a whole world to save," - said by a private landowner to a conservation practitioner.

Differences across states in how prescribed fire can be implemented by landowners and even agency/organization staff members were raised, including required training, certifications, burn plans, burn plan approval processes, and liability. Where change may be desired in the political and regulatory sides of prescribed fire, it is recommended that any changes *must* be requested by, demanded by, and driven by the landowners. Check into your state Prescribed Fire Councils. Oklahoma State University provides a good resource on "**Prescribed Burn Associations**" and how to set them up.

Recommendations regarding landowner fire cooperatives include:



- Work with rural fire departments.
- Don't underestimate the power of mechanical removal if you are hitting woody encroachment early enough.
- **Rangeland Analysis Platform** (RAP) is a powerful tool to show landowners.
- Look for the root causes of resistance: Has the community suffered a bad wildfire or other natural event?
- Acknowledge that landowners are bearing the burden of risk with burning.
- The **Central Grasslands Research Extension Center** in Streeter, ND; the **Loess Canyons Rangeland Alliance** in NE; and the **Great Plains Grassland Initiative** are all good resources.

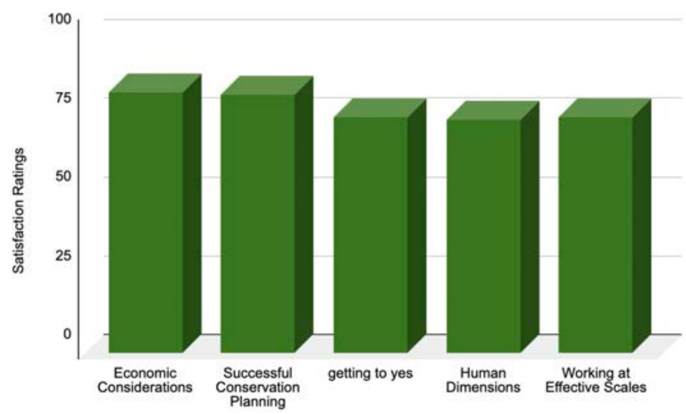
Feedback and Recommendations for Future Work

Practitioners, administrators, and landowner partners rarely talk directly about the human aspect of conservation and the associated skill set required to make it work. Yet in planning and holding this gathering, it was confirmed that those engaged in this work, regardless of perspective, are hungry for experiences that can help with understanding and successfully navigating this foundational process. Participants appreciated the chance to talk about their individual challenges, opportunities, and questions with others who are a part of the practice of voluntary conservation, regardless of perspective.

This conference was oversubscribed, and capped at 150 attendees. Based on the attendance, a final discussion among participants of the forum, and the results of a follow-up survey, we concluded that future forums are warranted and would be widely attended. Even though the process of relationship and trust-building may seem ancillary to conservation science, it is absolutely critical to conservation delivery on private lands and should be supported.

Post-meeting Survey Results

We received 47 responses to our post-meeting survey, representing roughly 32% of those in attendance. These responses indicate that more than 50% of attendees were with Pheasants Forever, more than 30% with state agencies, about 5% with USDA, and 10% “other” organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and the American Bird Conservancy. Attendees were drawn from six Midwest states, as intended, with the majority coming from Missouri, as would be expected considering the meeting was held there.



The overall average assessment of both enjoyment and utility of the meeting, rated on a scale of 0 to 100 (100 being best), was in the mid-80s. Individual sessions were also ranked highly (see graph above). The level of confidence for practitioners to discuss grassland management with landowners post-meeting was in the high 80s.

Reactions to the Meeting

Reactions by participants were overwhelmingly positive. Most feedback was aimed at improving the next meeting (including logistics and arrangements).

- "This conference has been energizing and reassuring—talking to people with the same goals, experiences, and challenges. Thank You!"
- "Great meeting! The human aspect is something that my field office sometimes forgets so the principles from this will come home with me!"
- "Thanks to the speakers and planning committee! Executing something like this is a real challenge, and y'all did excellent!"
- "Please do not change the format for next time! I found the discussion time with others very helpful."
- "Very energizing and refreshing conference, great having so many early practitioners in a room!"
- "Good balance of experienced practitioners and landowners on panels."
- "Good balance of training, exchanging ideas, and building camaraderie."
- "Nice venue, excellent evening social!"
- "It was a great meeting, and I wish it would have been available when I first started in my position! I've been on for a while, but still found this meeting to be very helpful!"

"Great meeting! The human aspect is something that my field office sometimes forgets so the principles from this will come home with me!"

- "Overall, I really enjoyed this meeting, and I know my fellow team members also enjoyed the event. Something that really impressed me was the effectiveness of communication and direction. Additionally, the diversity of landowners present at the meeting, because it seemed that each landowner had a different perspective and different motives. Some were cattlemen and ranchers, others were cash crop producers, and some landowners fit both categories while some landowners didn't farm or ranch—they just owned some acreage. This is what sold the event for me. Having that diversity of landowners really highlighted how we can address each of them individually and modify our actions and motives towards them directly. If anything is applied in the future years, please include a wide diversity of landowners. As private lands biologists, it allowed us a better understanding and opened our eyes to the variety of ways to approach and build a relationship with producers. Thank you for all your hard work and dedication to the event, it was a great time!"
- "I found the convention very helpful in reorienting my perspective from program-based conservation (how many CP25s can I get on the land?) to landowner goal based (how can these programs serve the landowner?)."
- "This meeting would have been great for Private Lands Bios just starting their careers, not experienced Biologists. Regardless, it was still an enjoyable meeting!"
- "I really enjoyed hearing from actual landowners, their perspectives, and take on things! Please have Bill at all of these in the future :) This should be a priority to attend for every new person just starting with private lands conservation. A lot of this was repeat to me, but you still leave with new knowledge and different perspectives!"
- "One of the better meetings I have been to in my 10+-year career. What made this one so successful was the structured discussion on day two, allowing the conversation to wander to relevant topics."

Supporting the Voluntary Conservation Practitioner Community

Learning from other practitioners and from actual landowners were consistently mentioned as positives. Comments and survey feedback indicated interest in participating in ongoing efforts to support practitioners engaged in voluntary conservation work, such as a peer-to-peer network, mentoring or coaching programs, and a contact list of subject matter experts or specialists.

Some specific suggestions for future work included geographic step-down, such as holding a session for a state or a couple of states. Other feedback indicated an interest in more content related to issues such as tips for working with female landowners and female practitioner safety (attendees were roughly evenly split between female/male), work-life balance generally, and support for early career professionals to improve productivity and retention.

Challenges and Concerns

Although voluntary conservation is challenging and rewarding work, it is not without its share of problems. Some complaints , concerns, and recommendations for improvements were expressed during the conference or in the survey, including too much emphasis on hard work at the expense of work-life balance and not enough scientific studies shared on related topics. Some felt the breakout sessions were unnecessarily long and repetitive. Other concerns were not enough emphasis on outreach challenges, including initial contact with landowners, finding and understanding program specifics in a timely fashion, understanding landowners' informational needs for individual decision making, and balancing individual workloads between relationship building and program delivery.

Some participants were hungry for information on partnering with what was described as "difficult" or "challenging" landowners and or partners. Identified landowner challenges included lack of interest in conservation, lack of recognition of resource concerns, and local knowledge or customs that are inconsistent with practitioners' understanding of ecologic systems. Also identified were some landowners' unwillingness to try new approaches, techniques or technology as well as unwillingness to listen to young and/or female practitioners.

Relationships and partnerships between individual practitioners and their organizations are not without issues. Lack of interagency communication and different opinions on conservation practices between partners were concerns identified. Changing expectations, policies, programs, and personnel—particularly at the federal level—were identified as challenges. Another cited concern was unavailability of contractors, as well as difficulty in procuring contractors due to long timelines for implementation and/or contract requirements.

Morning mist by Glendon Rolston, Creative Commons

The private lands focus on financial incentives for conservation can also present a challenge. Cost-share rates may not be competitive with crop prices, and basic agricultural economics (with current rates of inflation and supply chain challenges related to agricultural commodities) can lessen the attractiveness of incentive-based conservation programs.

Topics to Keep or Increase Focus

- Economic considerations from a landowner's perspective
- Prioritizing relationships to achieve conservation
- Successful projects for species of concern
- Getting to yes and building relationships
- Precision agriculture and human dimensions
- Developing cooperative efforts and Private Landowner Burn Associations (PBAs)
- What NOT to do to be successful
- Outreach information: successes, failures, ideas, and tools
- Range management/grazing

Additional Suggested Approaches and Topics

Respondents and commenters provided a wealth of suggestions for future meeting topics including:

- Have anonymous write-ins beforehand concerning specific struggles or personal situations, then pull the cards during the meeting and discuss
- More discussions about landowner cooperatives and collaborations, such as prescribed burning associations
- Including community/collaborative conservation involving more perspectives than practitioner and landowner
- How to deal with different landowners and people, different personality types
- How to work with different types of landowners: Full time job off-farm vs. farmers/ranchers/foresters
- Relevant innovative technology
- More communication prior to the next forum

Other input regarding future forums included regional breakout groups and sessions on additional topics such as practitioner burnout, linking science to management actions, and more specific follow up actions for the forum. As previously related, participants felt that hearing and better understanding the landowner perspective was valuable and that future events could benefit from hearing more from a broader diversity of landowners, including female landowners, minority landowners, tribal landowners, landowners who have chosen not to participate in conservation programs or practices, and landowners with divergent land ownership objectives—all in an effort to better engage the totality of the community of landowners.
New topics to consider also included:

- Forestry management
- Grazing native grasses/grassland management over rangeland management
- Shifting focus from structural practices to resilient grazing systems (i.e., continuing practices after payments have ceased)
- Presentations from professors who teach college agriculture, to understand what future farmers are being taught
- Working with contractors/attracting contractors
- Habitat heterogeneity on grazing lands

Process, logistical, or structural recommendations for improvement to consider included adding a field component, role playing (such as a mock site visit), walking through the entire process of developing and implementing an NRCS conservation plan, and more printed handouts.

A full day of presentations was seen as too much for some participants. The breakouts were valuable but several suggested they also should not occur all on the same day. A common suggestion was for presentations on a wider variety of topics to be followed by smaller groups and/or concurrent sessions, all on the same day. As previously mentioned, smaller geographic scope was suggested by some to better deal with regional differences, (such as native rangeland private lands vs tame pasture private lands). These types of concerns could be addressed in the design of concurrent breakouts in a meeting with a larger geographic scope.

Photo from T. J. Walker & Grotelueschen effective scales presentation at Forum

Having experienced and current practitioners in these breakouts was also seen as valuable. Other commenters recommended consideration of a better room with more visibility for presentations, consideration of a rural location to allow field-based content, adequate time and coordination if an offsite event is planned, and better variety and quantity of refreshments.

Finally, the practitioners that responded to the survey or that offered comments were universally appreciative of the inclusion and participation by landowners, who had their travel expenses reimbursed but were otherwise not paid to be in attendance. A common theme among commenters was to find ways of involving more landowners and more landowner perspectives in future meetings, as reported above. Having landowners that were (a) hesitant at first, but who have ultimately had good experiences, (b) have not participated in conservation programs, or (c) who have had a negative experience were identified as ideas to consider for future meetings.

How This Forum Was Planned and Delivered

An interagency/inter-organizational planning team both organized and delivered this event. NABCI found a broad range of partners that were interested in supporting voluntary conservation to both serve on the planning team and to participate financially as sponsors. The forum was held as a typical professional conference in a downtown hotel of a major urban area. The hotel was used for most of the food service, all of the meeting room space and audio-visual support, and all of the lodging space. There was an opening reception with speaker, two full days of sessions inside the hotel, and one off-site reception.

The overall forum budget, less travel support, was close to $55,000. There was a registration cost for participants of $150. The largest financial supporter was USDA-NRCS, but financial support was broad-based among state fish and wildlife agencies and conservation nonprofits. Efforts were made to minimize participation costs for speakers and to provide financial support for travel for those in need of support, especially the landowner speakers who were all volunteering their travel and participation time to the forum. Another big thank you to the American Bird Conservancy who served as the administrative organization for stewarding funds and paying bills.

Items for Future Planners to Consider

One major key to successful inter-organizational forum planning is to identify a nonprofit organization or other entity that can serve as the lead on financial matters (contracts, receiving funds, dispersing funds) and ideally one that has experience developing and delivering events. Event planning and logistical management for events is a profession, and local, regional and national contractors are available. This may be very helpful if the organizing partnership has a financial management organization with limited experience with event logistics. Feedback received from participants included consideration of a “closer to the resource” venue for the event, which could reduce costs and more readily incorporate a field component or field trip—also mentioned by participants.

If the primary audience for any future forums includes field level practitioners and landowners that work on the land, consider the local land management calendar as well as the dates of other events competing for the same potential audience when scheduling. Give the team sufficient time to plan the forum agenda and logistics. Finally, communicate with registered or potential participants beforehand to maximize alignment with relevant voluntary conservation issues for the geography served.

Private Lands Partners Day 2018 by Jodi Stemler

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Forum Planning Committee Members

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- Jim Giocomo, American Bird Conservancy
- John Jay Morgan, National Bobwhite and Grassland Initiative Director
- Steve Jester, Partnerscapes (speaker)
- Ritch Nelson, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Wes Sowards, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (speaker)
- Scott Taylor, Pheasants Forever (speaker)
- T. J. Walker, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (speaker)
- Bill White, Missouri Department of Conservation – retired (speaker)

Speakers and Presenters

- Carl Bendure, Kansas landowner
- Rachel Bush, Conservation Programs Manager, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever
- Scott Edwards, NRCS State Conservationist, Missouri
- Chelsea Forehead, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
- Len Gilmore, Missouri Department of Conservation (retired)
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- Jim Stone, Montana landowner and Partnerscapes chair
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