

BWSR Academy offers hands-on training, peer learning



David Demmer, BWSR wetland specialist, teaches BWSR Academy participants how to use a hydric soil indicator manual during a soil and plant lab Oct. 30. The training was part of the three-day BWSR Academy.

Photo Credit: Mary Juhl, BWSR

More than 450 conservation professionals from throughout Minnesota took part in training at BWSR Academy in late October, choosing from more than 60 sessions and workshops designed to help them work more effectively and efficiently.

Academy strives to provide high-quality training for local government staff that supports, maintains and improves the delivery of conservation work and meets the shared expectations of BWSR and local resource management boards. The goal is to provide relevant, cost-effective training that local conservation partners can apply directly to their work. Organizers follow guiding principles as they

develop a comprehensive training schedule.

Academy training sessions and workshops are organized into several topics or “tracks” including Organizational Capacity, Technical Training, Outreach, Program Training, Basics and Workshops. The wetlands track offered in previous years was replaced with an Outreach track. Regional wetlands training was provided outside of Academy and select wetlands sessions were offered within other tracks. The new Outreach track aims to help participants develop communications and event-planning skills.



Participants practice assessing soil color and texture during a soil and plant lab at BWSR Academy Oct. 30. The two-part workshop guided participants through the process of using a hydric soil indicator manual and covered basic plant anatomy and identification.

Photo Credit: Mary Juhl, BWSR

“Thank you so much for working on forming this Outreach track in the Academy, it’s been a game changer for me in my attendance,” one attendee wrote in an email.

More than 100 trainers shared their knowledge and expertise during the three-day event. One-third of the trainers were local government staff.

“The focus on peer-to-peer learning continues to be a major factor in making BWSR Academy an effective training opportunity,” said Barbara Radke, BWSR statewide training coordinator. “At BWSR Academy, participants get a chance to develop new skills by learning from the expertise of their peers and others in their field.”

BWSR staff join local government staff, leading or attending sessions and assisting with logistics.

“Acting as a trainer is a learning opportunity in itself,” said BWSR Organizational Effectiveness Manager Jenny Gieseke, who led a session about handling hard conversations in professional settings. “Participants often raise questions and offer



Participants learn the basics of GIS surveying during the third and final day of BWSR Academy Oct. 31. BWSR’s Aaron Peter and Scott Smith plus Technical Service Area staff led hands-on exercises in waterway and basin surveys during the outdoor workshop.

Photo Credit: Mary Juhl, BWSR

perspectives that help frame a topic in new and informative ways.”

Radke said BWSR office and administrative staff and the 15-member program team played a large role in the event’s continuing

success. Planning begins more than a year in advance, and plans for the 2019 Academy are already underway. Each year, the goal is to offer new sessions and limit the number of repeated topics to keep training fresh and current.



Left: Lauren Sampedro, Rice Creek Watershed District technician, prepares for a session about agricultural economics Oct. 29 during the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources’ BWSR Academy. **Right:** Linda Donnay, BWSR grants compliance specialist, left, and Deb Holtz of Meeker SWCD talk during a break between BWSR Academy sessions.

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