

BWSR Academy promotes peer-to-peer learning



Left: Participants complete a soil texturing exercise during an Oct. 30 BWSR Academy workshop on interpreting soil health tests. The workshop was led by State Soil Health Specialist Anna Cates and BWSR Wetland Specialist David Demmer.

Below: Cates demonstrates a texturing exercise that assesses soil composition for particles such as clays, silts and sands.

Photo Credits: Mary Juhl, BWSR



Peer-to-peer learning took center stage at the 2019 Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Academy Oct. 29-31 at Breezy Point Conference Center.

An annual training retreat for local government staff, BWSR Academy aims to provide high-quality workshops that help to improve the delivery of conservation work across the state while meeting the shared goals of BWSR and local resource managers. The goal is to provide relevant, cost-effective training that local conservation partners can apply directly to their work.

Over the course of three days, about 430 conservation professionals attended the 12th annual BWSR Academy. They chose from more than 60 training sessions. BWSR's priority for Academy sessions is to improve the technical



skills and administrative expertise of the local government staff who implement programs or activities directly related to BWSR's

mission. Academy training sessions and workshops are organized into categories including Organizational Capacity, Technical Training, Outreach, Program Training, and Workshops.

BWSR Training Coordinator Barbara Radke said the opportunity to hear from — and be trained by — peers who are implementing similar programs and initiatives is one of the guiding principles that distinguishes BWSR Academy from other conferences. The approach helps to make training relevant and applicable.

“It’s great to connect with others to see how they face the same challenges I am facing — innovation and problem-solving is best when shared,” one attendee stated in written feedback gathered during “The Role of Networks When Partnering With Others.” Radke offered that Oct. 30 session with Todd Holman, program director for The Nature Conservancy.

Learning from peers provides a different level of credibility, Radke said, because it connects trainees to people doing similar work in similar contexts. Peer-to-peer learning also reinforces understanding by connecting concepts and applying skills to the reality of the work. BWSR Academy attendees are asked to complete an action plan, which is meant to capture key points from each session and ideas about how to apply the skills on the job.

This year, more than 33 trainers were local government staff members. To promote peer-to-peer networking, BWSR Academy sessions are designed to be interactive. They include small-group discussions and activities, and trainers offer question-and-answer time.

“Learning from my peers makes me better,” another participant in Radke’s session stated via written feedback.

“Hearing from my peers broadens my perspective.”



Local government staff led a panel discussion during the Oct. 31 BWSR Academy session “Beyond Planning: Watershed-based Funding” organized by BWSR Clean Water Coordinator Marcey Westrick. **Photo Credit:** Mary Juhl, BWSR



Above: Conservation professionals worked on a leadership exercise Oct. 30 during “Everyday Leadership Skills: Learn from a Master,” a BWSR Academy session by John Linc Stine of the Freshwater Society and Kimberly Nuckles of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. **Photo Credit:** Ann Wessel, BWSR **Below:** A sign welcomed local government staff to the 2019 BWSR Academy. **Photo Credit:** Mary Juhl, BWSR

