

# BWSR Academy resumes in-person training



*Participants in the “Effectively Communicating Soil Health Through Interactive Demonstrations” session were split into teams and assigned a demonstration type and an audience type. Each team was then asked to practice their demonstrations in front of a neighboring table as if they were presenting to their assigned audience type. This team worked together to set up their demo and planned how they would communicate their message to corn and soybean associations or the Cattleman’s Association.*

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Ashley Rezachek,  
BWSR

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' annual training conference offered 65 training sessions to over 425 participants.



Conservation professionals from across the state gathered Oct. 25-27 for [BWSR Academy](#), which for the previous two years was delivered online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The written comments attendees shared with conference organizers reflected enthusiasm for the in-person training. Among them: “Can feel the excitement to be back in person” and “Huzzah! I’m not staring at a computer!”

“I actually really like the energy, because you can tell people are excited to be around each other and excited to learn. It’s a fun dynamic,” said Jennifer Mocol-Johnson, Academy trainer and BWSR performance review and

assistance program coordinator.

[BWSR Academy’s goal](#) is to provide high-quality training for local government staff, which allows them to maintain and improve the delivery of conservation work and meet the shared expectations of BWSR and local resource management boards. It aims to provide relevant, cost-effective training that local conservation partners can apply directly to their work.

Held at Cragun’s Conference Center in Brainerd, this year’s Academy offered 65 sessions and drew over 425 attendees and over 130 trainers. Sessions were organized into seven tracks: Organizational Capacity,



Fiscal Management, Programs, Outreach, Basic Technical, Advanced Technical and Workshops. The sessions explored a range of topics including grant tracking, digital accessibility, soil surveys, project management, public engagement, selling conservation and crop production.

This was Mocol-Johnson's fourth year hosting "Governing Galaxies," an orientation to conservation in Minnesota. Reflecting on the previous virtual conferences, Mocol-Johnson said she was excited to reconnect with people face-to-face.

"It's interesting because even being in the front (registration table) and watching people pick up packets, you have a whole new group of people that we haven't seen before. And there's also the group of people that have been here that are really excited to come back," Mocol-Johnson said. "There's a different energy, and it's a really fun, excited-to-be-here energy so it seems very engaged."

Tara Solem, Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District

(SWCD) manager, was among the many newer attendees this year. Solem started in her position in 2020 and attended Academy online for the last two years.

"It's been great seeing names and connecting (them) with the people rather than if I had just met people online," Solem said. "I like being able to talk to them and connect."

Solem attended all three days of the conference and joined sessions that interested her both as a conservationist and as a district manager. She said her favorites included the conflict resolution session and the green stormwater infrastructure session.

"I think all of the sessions that I went to were super good," she added. "So as far as, like, variety and topics, I think they hit it on the nose."

Planning for next year's BWSR Academy is already underway. Each year, the Academy planning team aims to offer new topics and limit the number of repeated topics to keep training relevant and fresh.



Those who attended the BWSR Academy session "Supporting Ag for All: Emerging Farmers Working Group" led by Minnesota Department of Agriculture Assistant Commissioner Patrice Bailey and Mitchell Hamline School of Law Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Michael Birchard listed potential challenges an emerging farmer may face. Later, participants brainstormed strategies to support farmers through these obstacles.



Participants gathered around Kristin Brennan, left, BWSR southern regional training conservationist, during the interactive "Can You Dig It?! Intro to Soil Survey Resources for Conservation Planning" session on Oct. 26. In this two-part workshop, participants learned how to access sources of soil information and generate interpretive products to support their conservation planning.