



Growth Committee

Committee Purpose: Identify new audiences that would benefit from engagement with the network and develop strategies for engaging them.

Committee Objective: Foster innovative partnership-based approaches to expand and accelerate producer voluntary adoption of conservation drainage practices/systems for their environmental, production, and economic benefits.

2022- 2023 Committee Roster

Chair: Tom Christensen, Ecosystem Services Exchange
Members: Ryan Arch, Illinois Land Improvement Contractors Association; Ryan Bartelheimer, Snohomish Conservation District; Andy Craig, Ecosystem Services Exchange; Randy Dell, The Nature Conservancy; Dr. Katie Dentzman, Iowa State University; Mark Dittrich, Minnesota Department of Agriculture; Isaac Ferrie, Crop-Tech Consulting, Inc.; Tom Giles, Minnesota Bureau of Soil and Water Resources; Darla Huff, Advanced Drainage Systems; Keegan Kult, Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition; Ariana Munoz, ShoreRivers; Jen Nelligan, National Association of Conservation Districts; Dr. Kelly Nelson, University of Missouri; Paige Peterson, Ohio State University Extension; Tim Rosen, ShoreRivers; Charlie Schafer, Agri Drain Corporation; Dr. Vinayak Shedekar, Ohio State University; Dr. Abigail Tomasek, Oregon State University

May 2022 - April 2023 Activities

- **Seeking greater commitment and support from USDA for conservation drainage implementation by producers:**
 - New information about USDA's solicitations for public input on programs and practices that had relevance to conservation drainage was shared with Growth Committee members as available for their awareness and consideration.
 - A subset of the Growth Committee focused considerable effort on identifying opportunities for NRCS to improve the efficacy of its practice scenarios and

payment schedules in support of financial assistance for producer-led conservation drainage practice/system planning, design, installation, and management.

- Information was provided through the Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition and other Growth Committee members to NRCS to identify issues, concerns, and recommended improvements that would facilitate greater support for conservation drainage implementation by producers.

- **Inclusion of key conservation drainage practices/systems as part of the climate-change mitigation and adaptation conversation:**

- **Summer 2022 Webinar** covering the following: “Understanding Changing Precipitation Patterns and Putting them into Perspective for Ag Production”, Eric Snodgrass, Principal Atmospheric Scientist, Nutrien Ag Solutions & “Conservation Practices as a Tool to Build Resiliency in Climate Change for Improved Production and Environmental Outcomes”, Dr. Ehsan Ghane, Michigan State University
- **Fall 2022 Webinar** covering the following: “Conservation Practices as a Tool to Build Resiliency in Climate Change for Improved Production and Environmental Outcomes”, Dr. Mike Castellano, Iowa State University
- Information was shared with the Growth Committee about the almost \$20 billion in NRCS Inflation Reduction Act funding, the NRCS Request for Information (RFI) on the implementation of this funding, and the opportunity to further inform NRCS about the role of conservation drainage practices/systems in furthering the achievement of climate change mitigation and adaptation goals. A number of Growth Committee members submitted comment letters to NRCS on this matter through their organizations and businesses in response to the RFI to better inform NRCS’s decision-making on the use of IRA funding in FY2023 and beyond. Comment letters from Growth Committee members to NRCS gave emphasis to the supporting rationale for drainage water management (CPS 554) as a climate-smart conservation practice with both climate-change mitigation and adaptation benefits.

- **Identifying and addressing barriers to the adoption of conservation drainage practices and systems:**

- Formulating and delivering a series of 5 webinars on a monthly basis from January 26 to May 24, 2023. For the time period of this annual report (through April 2023), webinars in January, February, March, and April 2023 were completed.
 - Webinars were sponsored by the Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition (ADMC), the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS), and the CDN Growth Committee (CDN-GC).

- Focus was on expanded and accelerated adoption of conservation drainage practices and systems by producers.
- The January through April 2023 webinars covered, respectively, “Sociological Assessment of Adoption Intentions, Behaviors, and Practices”, “Public and Private Sector Practitioners’ On-the-Ground Experiences and Perspectives on Adoption”, “Ag Producers’ Experiences and Perspectives on Adoption”, and “ Industry and Non-Governmental Organization Perspectives on Producer Adoption”.
- After the 5th webinar in May 2023, a summary and action report will be developed by ADMC/SWCS/CDN-GC to inform and foster adoption and management of conservation drainage practices in a system approach.

May 2023 – April 2024 Planned Activities

- **Completion of the summary and action report from the January through May 2023 series of 5 webinars on conservation drainage adoption:**
 - Final Report will be done in collaboration and concert with ADMC and SWCS, and make take multiple forms based on target audiences.
 - Objective is to further inform both public and private sector priority actions that will have a substantive positive impact on furthering the timely and more widespread adoption of conservation drainage practices in a system approach.
 - Emphasis to be placed on reducing/mitigating the barriers to producer adoption of conservation drainage practices in a system approach.
- **Continued collaborative work to seek greater emphasis on conservation drainage practices/systems for their multiple benefits, not only water quality improvement:**
 - Engagement with Committee members’ organizations and businesses and their continued efforts to encourage NRCS to adopt drainage water management (CPS 554) in its FY2024 Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Practice List, making it eligible for financial assistance to producers through Inflation Reduction Act funding.
 - Continued work with other CDN Committees to advance the understanding of and identification of the climate-change mitigation and adaptation benefits of conservation drainage practices, including continued encouragement to synthesize research results to better inform producer decision making, programmatic priorities, and initiatives
- **Continuous sharing of information about and results from new and innovative partnership-based approaches to accelerate and expand producer adoption of conservation drainage practices and systems:**
 - Iowa’s “batch and build model”, which has been especially effective for the adoption of denitrifying bioreactors.
 - Minnesota’s “turn key” model, which has been especially effective for the adoption of a suite of conservation drainage practices, including manual drainage

water management, automated drainage water management, denitrifying bioreactors, and saturated buffers.

- Iowa-based private-sector led conservation drainage implementation projects that have been effective with edge-of-field conservation drainage practices - - denitrifying bioreactors and saturated buffers.
- Other innovative conservation drainage projects that are just beginning implementation or for which funding applications have been submitted, including additional “turn key” projects and Regional Conservation Partnership Program projects (in Indiana and Iowa). These additional “turn key” projects were under formulation in Delaware, Minnesota, and Ohio for federal fiscal year 2024 implementation.