

GLSNRP Dialogues 2024

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Insights from the 2024 GLSNRP Dialogues

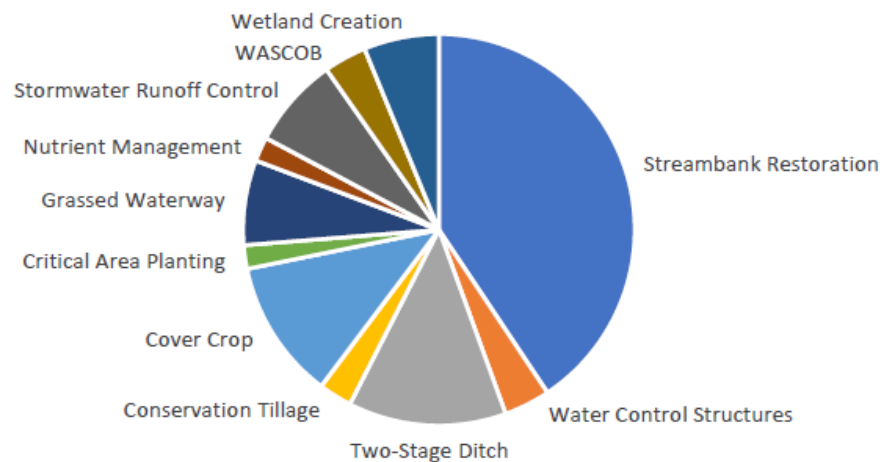
The [Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program](#) is a state and federal partnership managed by the Great Lakes Commission (GLC) in cooperation with the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. EPA, and the eight Great Lakes states. Through this program, the GLC has provided grants to nonfederal units of government and watershed organizations to install erosion and sediment control practices in the Great Lakes basin for over 30 years.

Since 2010, funding for the program has been provided by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The funding has been directed to innovative projects that help address sources of nutrient and sediment losses within the basin. The program is directed by a task force that includes representatives from the states, NRCS, and U.S. EPA; the task force identifies priorities for funding and reviews proposals to award funding each year. Six awardees for 2024 were announced in early October. An example from the most recently completed agreement (2019 grantees) depicts the wide array of practices funded by the GLSNRP.

In August 2024, current and past grantees were brought together, along with state and federal partners engaged in nutrient reduction around the Great Lakes basin, to discuss what's working, opportunities to do more, and how efforts might adapt in the face of a changing climate. Here is what Great Lakes Commission staff heard from 30 attendees.

AGREEMENT 9 GLSNRP PRACTICES

Under Agreement 9 the Great Lakes Sediment & Nutrient Reduction Program funded a variety of best management practices.



Dialogue #1: Who is in charge of drainage?

Participants were divided into small groups across states to discuss local water and drainage management. Groups were asked to identify past successes or challenges, opportunities for new partnerships, and big ideas.

Opportunities to work with new partners

- Local entities
 - Coordinate with planning commissions/agencies, county surveyors, local road agencies
 - Engage with zoning authorities
 - Consider municipalities, especially those downstream from areas of interest
- Regional entities
 - Look to the Lake Superior Collaboration in Wisconsin as an example
 - Organize drainage water management by watershed boundaries
 - Connect with Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects
- Federal entities
 - Partner with NRCS representatives
 - Utilize FEMA pre-disaster funds
 - Embrace innovation in compensating landowners for conservation practices

Obstacles and opportunities for improvement

- Permitting, including increased costs arising from permitting processes
- Decision-makers siding with economic development and political challenges (government bureaucracy)
- Connecting producers/landowners to programs for better follow through
- Finding funding to support monitoring, maintenance, permitting, and design
- High competition for limited funding
- Finding funding when priorities do not align with funding sources
- Grantors have focused on underserved areas when other areas can have big benefits for water quality
- Building capacity to move beyond planning and into implementation
- Barriers to establishing stormwater utilities and gaps in authorities governing drainage water
- Limited influence of downstream stakeholders
- Finding partners and establishing steady funding for staff efforts

Solutions and past successes

- Changes in public perception and education of students on conservation work
- Demonstrated triple bottom line improvements
- Coordination between watershed groups and collaboration among agencies
- Utilizing nontraditional local groups as partners such as land trust organizations
- Adaptive management of phosphorus trading
- Ability to leverage local funds to secure grants
- Leveraging partnerships to deliver public education programs and implement BMPs

Big ideas

- Investing in storytelling
- Rethinking how agriculture interacts with the watershed

- Incorporating triple bottom lines in watershed planning documents
- Consolidating SWCDs in favor of watershed-based planning and management agencies
- Streamlining permitting for restoration projects and flood mitigation
- Connecting various state laws to make them more effective
 - Drain codes, land use laws, inland lake boards
- Integrating watershed work with economic development and existing municipal expenses
- Thinking about water detention at the regional scale
- Investing in Ag Runoff Treatment Systems (ARTS) for phosphorus removal
- Consider the benefits of beavers (or beaver analogs if beavers and dams are controversial)

Dialogue #2: How are your teams maximizing water quality benefits?

Participants were divided into three larger groups across states to discuss how water storage and climate resilience needs are influencing planning. Groups were asked to map what they need to maximize benefits, store water, and inspire landowner participation.

Groups identified the following themes for continued conversation:

What is working?

- Private sector involvement
- Pay for performance strategies
- Having partners at the table including farmer-led groups and peer-to-peer networks plus other local stakeholders, informed elected officials, and early practice adopters
- Land trusts enhancing water quality and storage on their properties
- Drainage water management and climate smart irrigation
- Phasing larger projects to determine which components are working to maximize benefits

Continued needs

- Reliable practices to address legacy phosphorus
- Training on tools to identify priority areas and communicate with landowners
- Flexible incentives to reflect the wide range of owner and operator interests
- Longer-term funding to maintain practices
- Messaging to communicate economic benefits and return on investment to landowners
- Funding for projects that have documented success, not just new or innovative “pilot” projects
- Better (accessible) data and models for decision-making informed by holistic impacts upstream and downstream including remote sensing opportunities and tools
- Support staff recruitment, retention and skill-building (including both traditional SWCDs and watershed groups) through structured training and bonuses

Key Takeaways

- Permitting remains a challenge for many grantees
- Recent influx of federal grant funding has created a misalignment of reporting requirements and restrictions inhibiting staff time
- SWCD staff feel the burden of modeling and assessment work
- Regenerative agriculture will come with unique challenges for adoption, but many practices are already being trialed by landowners under the moniker of “soil health”
- Precision planning tools such as the ACPF are desirable but require expertise and pre-planning work which many organizations struggle to find

- Groundwater storage BMPs connected to baseflow and offsetting payments for groundwater recharge BMPs
- More collaboration with private agronomists through a combination of in-person connections and data connectivity
- Simplified applications and resources to understand the applicability of available funding without the burden of searching through criteria and restrictions

Participant feedback

“The discussions were interesting. The perspectives and opportunities from different states were useful!”

“The size of the group was great for inspiring good conversation. Muskegon was great for many reasons: location, relevant projects, venue.”

“The field trip was great. It's nice to see what other communities are doing and even better when you get to experience it in the field. The conversational aspect of this conference was a welcomed change to what I'm used to.”

What's next?

Each year, GLC staff work with NRCS colleagues and the GLSNRP Task Force to develop a [Request for Proposals](#) seeking new sediment and nutrient reduction projects. The Request for Proposals is generally released by mid-February, with awardees notified during the summer months so that contracts may be put in place prior to the start of the federal fiscal year (October 1).

GLC staff and the Task Force are looking forward to another round of [GLSNRP Dialogues](#), tentatively planned for [summer 2026](#).

Disclaimers

This material is based upon work supported by NRCS under awards funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Any opinions, findings, conclusion, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This publication was created by Great Lakes Commission staff, transcribing ideas shared by 2024 GLSNRP Dialogues participants.

The Great Lakes Commission is a binational government agency established in 1955 to protect the Great Lakes and the economies and ecosystems they support. Its membership includes leaders from the eight U.S. states and two Canadian provinces in the Great Lakes basin.

The GLC recommends policies and practices to balance the use, development, and conservation of the water resources of the Great Lakes and brings the region together to work on issues that no single community, state, province, or nation can tackle alone.