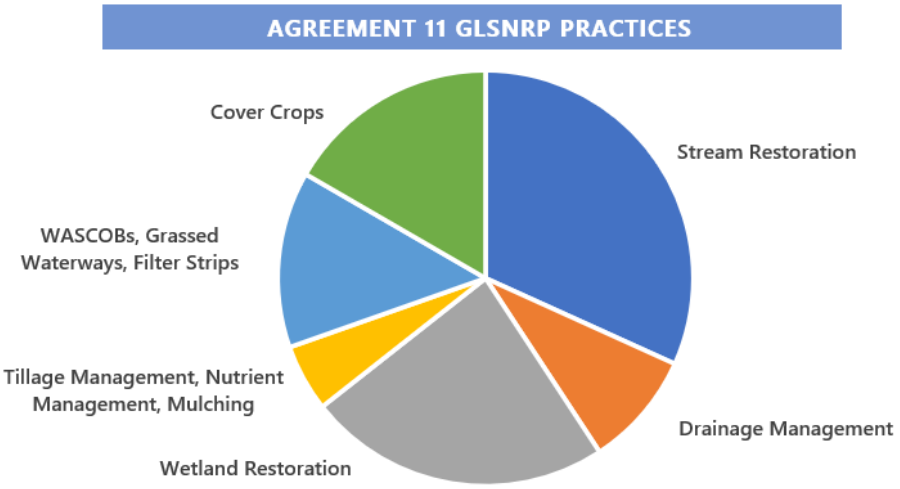
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GLSNRP Dialogues 2026

Celebrating 35 Years of Sediment & Nutrient Reduction Grant-Making

Insights from the 2026 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 35 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. An example from the most recently completed agreement (2021 grantees) depicts the wide array of practices funded by the GLSNRP.

This year marked 35 years of grant making under the GLSNRP. In celebration of this milestone, current and past grantees were brought together in August 2026, 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 50 attendees.

Participant feedback

"I enjoyed the diversity of the attendees and the opportunity to hear different perspectives that share the conservation and practice implementation space. I also appreciated hearing about the cutting-edge types of implementation components."

"The field tour was excellent. Additionally, having it first on the agenda set the stage very nicely for some of the presentations and sessions that came later."

"While small, the audience struck a nice balance between local SWCDs, state agencies, and watershed and local-level implementation-focused groups."

To commemorate the GLSNRP's 35th anniversary, the event was co-sponsored by the Fund for Lake Michigan and held at the Lambeau Field conference center in Green Bay, Wisconsin. The location allowed local partners to highlight approaches grantees have used to reduce sediment and nutrient loads to the Fox River and Bay of Green Bay. A presentation by GLC staff highlighted the history of the program including the creation of a Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Task Force in 1986 and establishment of the Great Lakes Basin Program (the original name of the GLSNRP) in 1991. Other key takeaways from the two-day event are highlighted in the segments below.

GLSNRP Task Force Panel: Perspectives on Projects

- The GLSNRP benefits from federal and state perspectives on the Task Force including insights from state grant programs
- The future success of the GLSNRP will likely come from its flexibility and ability to incorporate outreach and education in addition to strictly structural practices seen in other GLRI programs
- Participants spoke to the Task Force about future issues such as contaminated sediment and the use of AI in grant proposal writing

Remarks from Congressman Tony Wied

- Congressman Wied serves the Green Bay area and spoke to the importance of GLRI funding and GLSNRP projects to the region
- His priorities include protecting the Great Lakes for their importance to the local economy and industry and for water quality, wildlife habitat and health of future generations
- Noted the importance of passing a Farm Bill and EQIP funding in particular and spoke to future issues such as PFAS pollution, management of industrial pollution, and educating representatives on Great Lakes issues



Congressman Wied addresses participants.

Remembering our Why (Downstream Impacts)

Several speakers addressed the impacts which nutrient and sediment pollution have downstream in the Great Lakes to better connect attendees focused on preventing sediment and nutrient loss from their watersheds with the downstream impacts conservation practitioners strive to avoid.

NEW Water's work to address harmful algal blooms in the Bay of Green Bay

- Water quality and nutrient monitoring programs in the Bay of Green Bay display the gradient of nutrient-rich water emptied from the agricultural watersheds of the Fox and Wolf rivers
- Persistent harmful algal blooms plague Green Bay, and the cyanotoxin levels follow the same gradient as nutrients, though annual phosphorus levels are improving
- NEW Water also addressed the challenge of educating the public by partnering with the Brown County Public Health Department and contracting a consulting firm to create the "Don't Get Sick, Avoid the Ick" campaign to provide concise and shareable materials to inform the public about staying safe



Jeremy Freund of Outagamie County displays the ARTS system on land owned by the Heart of the Valley Metropolitan Sewerage District to field trip participants.

Flowing downriver: exploring sediment and nutrient downstream impacts and solutions through innovative beneficial reuse

- A new GLC program centered on sediment management to support restoration and resilience was highlighted with its connection to GLSNRP projects addressing sedimentation upstream to improve downstream impacts. The program has goals to increase knowledge sharing to change the perspective to system-wide thinking of sediment life cycle management.
- Wisconsin DNR highlighted a local restoration project which utilizes beneficial dredged materials for habitat reestablishment on Cat Island in Green Bay
- Research at Bowling Green State University has demonstrated that dredged material as a farm soil amendment improved soil chemical properties and root development and suggests potential benefits on nitrate exports though more search is needed on contaminants in dredged materials, farmer attitude toward adoption and heavy metal concentrations

Examples of sediment and nutrient reduction techniques

Participants appreciated hearing directly from other grantees sharing their work around the basin. Below are highlights of the project talks presented by grantee participants and from a keynote and panel focused on communicating with landowners and project partners for improved outcomes.

Successful GLSNRP Projects- Lightning Talks

- Successful agricultural projects included the Soil Health Education & Demonstration (SHED) facility created by Outagamie County Land Conservation Department (Wisconsin), an alternative approach to agricultural runoff treatment systems (ARTS) being deployed in Ottawa County (Ohio), and a county-wide conservation buffer in Putnam County (Ohio)
- Grantees from Cleveland Metroparks (Ohio), the City of Manitowoc (Wisconsin), and the South St. Louis SWCD (Minnesota) shared streambank project examples which demonstrated natural restoration techniques including floodplain restoration, riparian reestablishment, and creation of meanders in both rural and urban focus areas

Leveraging Social Science to Improve Outreach and Protect Water Quality

- A keynote from National Wildlife Federation colleague, Dr. Adam Reimer focused on the social science of conservation practice adoption noted that sustained interaction with natural resource professionals is important to initiate conservation adoption. Tailoring language and framing risk within the proper context for the audience can create opportunities for change, especially in a safe space led by fellow agricultural producers. This was illustrated through the example of expanding farmer-led networks throughout the Midwest
- A panel focused on communicating with landowners noted that recognizing success of landowners and inviting new partners to participate in local work had disproportionately higher benefits compared to the traditional outreach efforts. Utilizing proven conservation practices may create consistent results instead of chasing innovations.

Underlying support for sediment and nutrient reduction

Several experts gave talks on the foundations of the work of conservation practice installation. Researchers from Ohio State University provided an update on an ongoing research project partnering with the GLC to understand challenges and opportunities for conservation districts in the Great Lakes states. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources talked through the process for permitting conservation work. Compeer Financial gave a presentation on insights to farm lending and financial issues to better understand landowner decision making and risk tolerance. Several highlights from these talks are presented below.

Findings from the OSU-GLC Survey of Great Lakes State Conservation Districts



Dr. Berardo of OSU presents results from his research to the audience.

- Early results from a survey of conservation district staff and board members indicated that compensation was the most important factor affecting recruitment and retention and many employees see limited opportunities for long-term growth
- Collaboration across districts is common which provides a foundation to address future workforce issues and prevent conservation districts from being seen as a stepping stone to other work
- There was some variation in responses among states including differences in perspectives on district financial stability which may be caused by diverse funding mechanisms across states
- Since the event in Green Bay, a final report on this work has been posted to www.glc.org/work/cwd.

Pulling Permits: Lessons Grantees Have Learned and Regulator Perspectives

- In Wisconsin, state permitting for conservation work includes analyzing project proposals to minimize impacts and categorize proposals into exemptions, general permits and individual permits
- Wisconsin has separate permitting pathways for wetland and waterways regulations which can impede a more holistic review of projects grouping wetland with stream work
- The current code allows for more diverse statewide general permitting options that are themed around project types which can reduce the number of permits previously required if project types involve both wetland and waterway regulations

Farm Finance 101: Basics Every Conservation Professional Should Know Before Sitting Down with a Producer

- Compeer Financial shared that farm loans are commercial loans with few regulations and multiple lender types which means few consumer protections exist and can lead to risky scenarios for farmers
- Many farmers are unaware of lending options and governmental programs which are available
- Both profitability and cash flow are needed for long-term economic sustainability which means farmers with higher debt and that are renting land are more likely to have financial stress
- Conservation professionals can support the lender community by inviting them to events and networks and educating them about best management practices

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 early in the calendar year, 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 2028.



GLSNRP Task Force members and GLC staff in attendance at the Dialogues event.

Disclaimers

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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 2026 GLSNRP Dialogues speakers and 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.