



**Title:** Multi-State Approach to Conservation Professional Development and Training

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**Organization:** University of Wisconsin-Extension

**State:** WI      **Region:** Great Lakes

**Year of Funding:** 2002

**Theme:** Watershed Management

**Situation:** Over the past few years, a significant percentage of land grant and county/state/federal conservation staff have reached retirement age or have been offered early retirement. This loss of the most experienced conservation educators and staff will accelerate over the next few years as a greater percentage of employees become eligible for retirement and federal and local budgets dictate a shifting of resources. With the loss of the most experienced staff, the next generation of conservation staff will be less able to meet the ever-growing need of farm and non-farm landowners. In some areas, this trend is already affecting the level of service available. In response to these trends, the Great Lakes Regional Water Quality Team funded this 406 project to provide both base core competencies and advanced professional development and continuing education for conservation staff.

**Objectives:** The project objectives include the development, implementation and evaluation of a conservation training and continuing education program in the following focus areas - 1. Core Conservation (targeting newly hired (<5 years experience) staff, designed to bring staff up to a common base level of knowledge in people skills, evaluation techniques, conservation history and landowner education skills. 2. Conservation Planning: A set of modules that will bring employees to a common skill level. 3. Targeted topics: Specialized training in Managed Grazing, CNMP, Forestry, Pest Management and other topics.

**Methods:** A curriculum and educational modules are under development for each of the above-mentioned focus areas. These will be available via a combination of classroom, CD-Rom and internet delivery methods.

**Partnerships:** Project is funded via a CSREES Great Lakes 406 grant, with land grant support from all participating states. Additional partnerships are being developed with NRCS and local conservation agencies in each state.

**Research:** Since the implementation of outside certification programs (such as CCA), local (county) conservation departments have shifted professional development dollars to support a limited number of staff with continuing education requirements for their certification. While this has increased attendance at some programs, land grant institutions have reduced or eliminated other offerings to meet this need. This program is bringing together the latest in technical and applied research from each land grant to provide staff with the information they need in the field. Our goal is to eliminate the (more and more common) situation where a landowner asks staff about an innovative conservation practice he/she read about in a magazine, and the only information the staff member has is the same magazine article.



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