

Wisconsin Women in Conservation: Announces educator meet-up for Women's History Month

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Chippewa Falls, WI – Wisconsin Women in Conservation is kicking off Women's History Month with a Conservation Educator Network Meet Up on March 8, from 10-11am on Zoom. Women conservation educators and researchers are making history every day in Wisconsin, as are the women landowners and farmers they work with to steward land, water and wildlife. The March Meet Up will celebrate conservation work being led and done by women in the state, and will include both a statewide convening of educators and breakouts in regional networking groups. All conservation educators are invited to participate, both men and women, from agency staff to non-profit volunteers. Pre-registration is required, but free, at WiWiC.org.

The March 8 meet-up will provide resources for conservation educators and opportunities for networking and career development. Dr. Diane Mayerfeld, Sustainable Agriculture Outreach Specialist with UW-Madison Extension, will be sharing resources and grant and professional funding opportunities from USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE). Dr. Mayerfeld will also report on findings and next steps from the UW-Madison New Landowner Success project, a new statewide research project focused on better understanding and supporting new landowners. Dr. Mayerfeld is a Wisconsin silvopasture researcher.

Julie Peterson, Farm Bill Biologist with Pheasants Forever, will be sharing career insights during the March 8 Meet-Up. "I am so inspired by the many young women

jumping into conservation careers and look forward to offering thoughts on what I wish I knew when I got started. I've been working as a conservation educator my whole career and while I find it extremely rewarding, I've learned along the way strategies on how to both better communicate with landowners and navigate the many layers of state agencies and programs," reflects Peterson.

The Educator Network is being facilitated by the Wisconsin Women in Conservation project (WiWiC), a state-wide collaborative effort led by the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in partnership with Wisconsin Farmers Union, Renewing the Countryside, E Resources Group and the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) with support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This is the network's second bi-annual meet up. The kickoff was in October 2021.

"We kicked off this new WiWiC Conservation Educator Network last October with an enthusiastic group of educators passionate about stewarding our land and providing ways to connect people to environmental awareness," shares Dr. Esther Shekinah, Project Lead for WiWiC, and a research agronomist at Michael Fields Agricultural Institute. Dr. Shekinah will moderate the March 8 event. "The goal of this WiWiC network is to regularly connect educators who work with women farmers and landowners. We share best practices, challenges and resources, develop cooperative strategies for effective programming and find ways to effectively work together."

"I found the first WiWiC Conservation Educator Network meet-up in October a really good use of my time to attend as it gave me the opportunity to connect with others so positively engaged with conservation education," said Marie Raboin, Soil Conservationist with the Land Conservation Department in Dane County, and co-owner of Brix Cider in Mount Horeb. "I left the gathering inspired to do something for the farmer-wives and women farmers of the Producer Led Watershed group that I help organize to more directly involve and support these women."

Women landowners are a growing demographic. The 2017 Census recorded 38,509 female producers in Wisconsin, showing that women make up 35 percent of all producers in the state, which is slightly higher than the national average of 30 percent. But women are a group that has been traditionally underserved by federal and state conservation agencies.

The three-year WiWiC initiative is collaboratively engaging women landowners across the state through workshops, field days, farm tours, mentorships, media content, email resource communications and other learning opportunities. The project hosted five on-farm field days and 15 virtual events, reaching a total of 1200 women in 2021. The group plans to host six regional on-farm field days and 12 Learning Circle events across the state in 2022, in addition to virtual events. WiWiC publishes a monthly e-newsletter, a Blog and Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram content, and hosts a women-only conservation Listserv. To stay informed of upcoming events, sign up for the e-newsletter at WiWiC.org.

Interested individuals who cannot attend the March 8 Meet-Up, but who would like to be involved with the Educator Network should contact eshekinah@michaelfields.org.