

Collaboration Protects Sources of Drinking Water

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Are you interested in accessing information and potential partners to advance your source water protection efforts? The national Source Water Collaborative can help.

Why collaborate for source water?

Water sources cross state and other jurisdictional boundaries, and water quality affects all communities, but there is no federal requirement to protect sources of drinking water. No single system connects all the agencies and professionals involved in protecting the nation's drinking water sources at the federal, state, and local levels. That's why the Source Water Collaborative (SWC) was formed – to help fill these gaps by sharing information and opportunities. In the past 14 years, the SWC has expanded to include 29 nationally prominent organizations representing drinking water utilities; conservation districts; state drinking water and groundwater protection programs; federal government agencies focused on environmental and public health, agriculture, and geological science; planners; agriculture; and other organizations committed to water quality, including the North American Lake Management Society.

We provide source water information to those positioned to act

Challenges to securing clean drinking water are becoming more complex and more interdependent across sectors and geographies. Emerging contaminants, multiple contaminant sources, land use changes and management challenges, increasing water demand, and extreme weather, are taxing capacities and driving up the cost of water treatment, underscoring our dependence on a secure water supply and the urgency of source water protection (SWP). The SWC is

defined by one core principle: that by working together and combining our strengths, resources and will to action, our diverse set of member organizations can realize greater successes than by working alone.

The SWC helps promote effective working relationships with a variety of programs that affect source water quality, including the Clean Water Act and multiple conservation programs in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Once the new Farm Bill was signed into law in December 2018, SWC members shared information at national meetings to encourage stakeholders to connect Farm Bill conservation provisions with state and local SWP opportunities; provided input to SWC member Natural Resources Conservation Service

(NRCS) for source water provision implementation; and met with SWC member US Forest Service (USFS) to discuss opportunities to promote SWP through Farm Bill Title VIII, Forestry. Most recently SWC hosted a [webinar](#) “Working with NRCS and Agricultural Partners to Protect Drinking Water Sources.”

The SWC continues to work with federal agencies to share information about programs that offer technical and financial assistance to address and implement practices on agricultural lands that benefit SWP. This type of new

Source Water Collaborative Members

- American Planning Association
- American Rivers
- American Water Works Association
- Association of Clean Water Administrators
- Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies
- Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
- Association of State Drinking Water Administrators
- Clean Water Action / Clean Water Fund
- Environmental Finance Center Network
- Ground Water Protection Council
- Groundwater Foundation
- National Association of Conservation Districts
- National Association of Counties
- National Environmental Services Center
- National Ground Water Association
- National Rural Water Association
- North American Lake Management Society
- River Network
- Rural Community Assistance Partnership
- Smart Growth America
- Soil and Water Conservation Society
- The Trust for Public Land
- U.S. Department of Agriculture – Farm Service Agency
- U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Forest Service (Northeastern Area)
- U.S. Geological Survey
- Water Systems Council

approach has helped communities address priority water quality issues in priority areas and with multiple benefits and partners. Two of these programs, the Resource Conservation Partnership Program and the National Water Quality Initiative are continuing under the new Farm Bill and specifically include both ground and surface water sources of drinking water.

We help people work across organizational lines

The SWC makes it easier for members to work outside jurisdictions and

across geographical and organizational boundaries. Are you interested in getting more agricultural conservation on the ground to help protect sources of drinking water? An important natural ally is SWC member, the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS, U.S. Department of Agriculture), which includes the State Conservationist's or District Conservationist's offices. Another key set of allies is conservation districts – important partners at the local level, who also have helpful contacts at the state level – represented by SWC member, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

As a result of extensive collaboration between members of the Source Water Collaborative, NACD and the NRCS, we developed toolkits that offer a step-by-step approach for collaboration and insightful tips based on advice we received from NRCS and NACD, and from state and regional source water coordinators based on their experience fostering effective partnerships. Here are a few tips from our conservation toolkits.

Key opportunities to connect with agricultural partners at the state level

Looking to share information about your source water concerns and to have a voice in identifying priority opportunities in your state?

- *Get to Know Your Associate State Conservationist for Programs.* They have information about how the state NRCS office sets priorities and makes funding decisions, and they can make sure you receive notification when funding opportunities become available. Ask how the state NRCS office plans to address source water protection in its ranking criteria for conservation programs. This [infographic](#) with the 2018 Farm Bill source water provisions might be helpful in making your case for source water protection projects.
- *Participate in Your State Technical Committee Meeting.* Contact your State NRCS office and ask to be on the email list to attend a State Technical Committee meeting. This public meeting is a great place to make a variety of connections with agriculture leaders in one place, to become familiar with their priorities and concerns, to share source water

concerns and priorities, and to understand how the Committee develops recommendations for the NRCS State Conservationist's funding decisions. Each State Technical Committee meeting has a different dynamic. Some can be very formal so it is best to respect the process and observe more in the beginning, to develop your understanding. There may be a chance during a "round robin" part of the agenda to briefly describe your role in drinking water protection. If you have limited time, introduce priority geographic areas for protecting drinking water sources, and express your interest in working with conservation districts.

- *Conservation districts often participate in State Technical Committee meetings.* Be sure to express your interest in meeting with conservation districts, and suggest a follow-up meeting with those interested. If the next State Technical Committee meeting will not be held for a while, you may want to reach out first to schedule a meeting with the State Executive Director, or other recommended state contact listed on the NACD website.

Key opportunities to connect with agricultural partners at the local level

- *Get to Know Your Local Conservation District.* The size of the conservation district staff varies by district. Some have no staff – in that case, contact your conservation district board member. Each conservation district has an annual workplan or report, which can be a helpful resource to help you identify their priority issues and areas. Check the conservation district's website to see if the annual plan is available. If it's not on the web, contact their state office to request a copy. The conservation district may be assisting landowners in developing conservation plans with practices that can help protect drinking water sources. Sharing your source water data and maps can help inform this planning process.
- *Attend a Local Working Group Meeting.* This NRCS meeting is a

good way to meet local landowners and operators (farmers, ranchers, forested land owners) and district staff, and to hear their perspective on local issues "on the ground." Recommendations for decisions about USDA-NRCS local funding distribution are developed at these meetings.

Be persistent. It is important to "keep showing up" at agriculture meetings in your state or at the county level if you're interested in a specific geographic area. If conservation district staff and NRCS staff see you showing up regularly at their meetings, it will demonstrate that you are genuinely interested in working with them. You will start to receive other invitations and be afforded opportunities to participate more.

Collaborative resources

In addition to some of the toolkits mentioned above, the SWC has developed actionable resources for creating and sustaining key partnerships.

- The How-to-Collaborate toolkit takes users step-by-step through the creation of a collaborative partnership – from the brainstorming stage to how to maintain relationships long-term, including funding options. The toolkit can be applied to any issue that is ripe for collaboration and is free to use.
- The SWC created the Learning Exchange, an information-sharing platform, features webinars that harness the power of its diverse members to provide a dynamic venue for collaboration on vital issues of water security and safety. Topics include:
 - Linking SWP to Emergency Preparedness
 - Funding for SWP
 - SWP Through Conservation Funding
 - Nutrient Reduction Successes
 - Multi-Purpose Decision Support Systems for SWP Strategies
 - Creative Partnerships
 - Forming and Sustaining Collaboratives

Do you know your local or regional source water collaborative?

The SWC has been a model for bringing diverse groups together to create solutions that work for communities. This model is being replicated across the country at the local, state and regional/ watershed level. A wide variety of collaboratives are working around the country on drinking water issues at local, state, and regional levels. The SWC's website features the work of 30+ collaboratives across the country (Figure 1). Visit today to find a collaborative near you or to feature your work.

Resources

- Visit the Source Water Collaborative [website](http://www.sourcewatercollaborative.org)

- Sign up to receive source water updates from the SWC (scroll to bottom of home page)
- Find your conservation district via this directory
- Find your [Associate State Conservationist](#) for Programs
- Use the [How-to-Collaborate Toolkit](#)
- Use the [Conservation Partners Toolkit](#)
- Use the [infographic on commonalities with State Conservationist](#)
- Connect with a Source Water Collaborative member
- Find a [SWC in your area](#)

Contact Us

We welcome your questions, updates and information: info@sourcewatercollaborative.org

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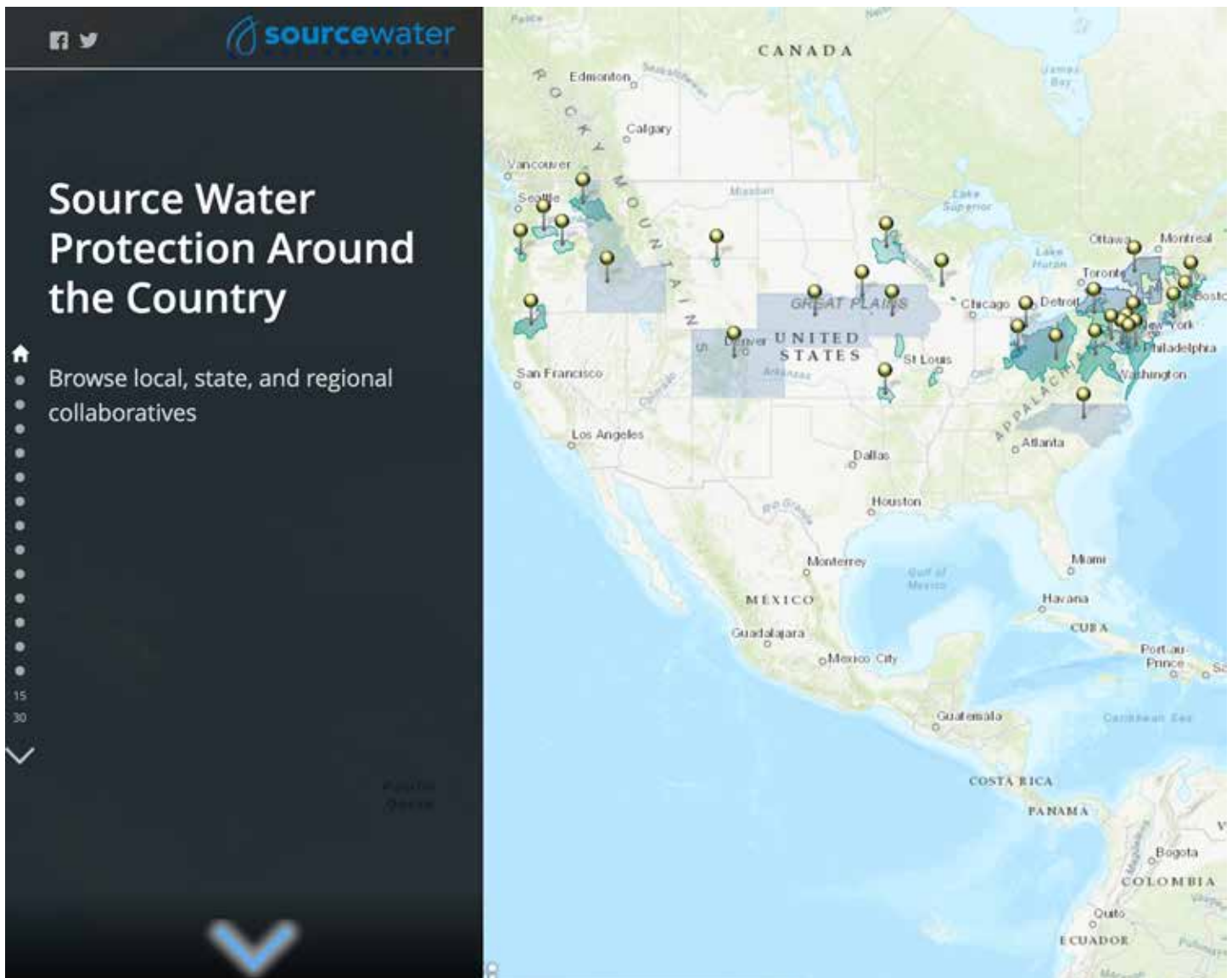


Figure 1: Collaboration map from www.sourcewatercollaborative.org.