Fishers & Farmers Partnership has answered a national call to improve U.S. waters and fisheries through the National Fish Habitat Partnership. Fishhabitat.org

Fish Habitat Partnerships consist of state, federal, and tribal agencies, non-governmental organizations, corporations and private individuals. They are self-identified, self-organized, and self-directed communities of interest formed around geographic areas, keystone species, or system types. There are five that focus their efforts all or in part in the Midwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These include the Driftless Area Restoration Effort, Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership, Great Lakes Basin Fish Habitat Partnership, Ohio River Basin Fish Habitat Partnership, and the Fishers and Farmers Partnership of the Upper Mississippi River. Fish Habitat Partnerships are the working units of the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

The mission of the National Fish Habitat Partnership is to protect, restore and enhance the nation’s fish and aquatic communities through partnerships that foster fish habitat conservation and improve the quality of life for the American people.

**Highlights:**

- Fishers & Farmers Partnership Working with NRCS & County Employees on Soil Health
- “School to Fam Program” on FFP Chair, Rod Ofte’s Farm
- Fishers & Farmers Steering Committee: Making Waves in Hannibal, MO
- FFP’s Watershed Leaders Network - Eagle Bluff, MN
- Big Muddy River Project Complete in Southern Illinois
- Cannon River Watershed Partnership Buffer Field Day

**Upcoming Events:**

Farmer Veteran Coalition, Pasture Project, UW-Extension, NRCS, Starting a Successful Beef Operation – Managed Grazing in the Kickapoo Watershed - **Sunday September 11, 2016**

Fishers & Farmers Steering Committee Meeting **November 2-3, 2016**

Watershed Leaders Network – National Mississippi Museum & Aquarium, Dubuque, IA **November 28-30, 2016**, Learn more
After learning more about soil health from NRCS employees in Missouri and guest speaker Ray Archaeleta (NRCS-SC) at the Red Cedar Conference in WI, the Fishers & Farmers Partnership decided to purchase a rain simulator. The simulator has been educating not only farmers, but also biologists about the importance of soil health and how it can improve fish, wildlife and water quality in streams. “We don’t have a runoff problem,” Ray tells the EPA, “we have an infiltration problem. Tillage is not our friend.”

This past spring and summer, NRCS and county employees around Wisconsin have been using Fishers & Farmers rain simulator to educate farmers about soil health and train employees on how to engage farmers in more conservation practices. Specific topics include tillage practices, cover crops, residue, and managed grazing.

Shaunna Repking (NRCS-Onalaska, WI) attended the La Crosse Urban Stormwater’s outreach event to show how important soil health is in the city as well as the country.

**Soil Health – NRCS:** By farming using soil health principles & systems that include no-till, cover cropping and diverse rotations, more & more farmers are actually increasing their soil’s organic matter & improving microbial activity. As a result, farmers are sequestering more carbon, increasing water infiltration, improving wildlife & pollinator habitat—all while harvesting better profits & often better yields.

If fields are not tilled, healthy soil acts as a sponge & very little water runs off into streams & rivers.

Contact Fishers & Farmers Coordinator, Heidi Keuler, to learn more about scheduling the FFP educational trailer which includes a rain simulator and stream table for your event.
Most people are familiar with the “Farm to School Program” that brings local, tasty nutritious food to school cafeteria’s across the country, but how many students from city schools get to actually visit a real working farm that food comes from? Each spring, inner-city kindergarteners from Summit Elementary in La Crosse, WI, have the opportunity to visit a real farm and learn hands-on about the animals that live there. From touching the aquatic insects and fish in the healthy stream to the chickens, hogs and beef, children immerse themselves for a day in what it’s like to live on a farm. Rod Ofte, Fishers & Farmers Chair, personally takes the kids on a hay ride to stations around the farm to plant in the garden, gather eggs from the chicken coop, pet the sheep, and much more. New this past year, was an aquatic invertebrate station where students literally got their feet wet learning how biologists sample streams for water quality. Because of good conservation practices like managed grazing on the Ofte farm, students learned that both streams and farms can be productive. Some of the kids had never dipped their toes in a stream before, so the learning opportunities in this event were as endless as the giggles heard on the farm that day.
Fishers & Farmers had a productive planning meeting with 14 active members in attendance on July 14, 2016. Topics included project and agriculture updates in all 5 states, presentations from the Outreach, Science Team and Priorities Teams, and planning discussions relating to the strategic plan, request for proposals, funding process, website, monitoring, and Watershed Leaders Network.

On July 15, local Missouri farmers from the Peno Creek Watershed (Salt River Basin) and Fishers & Farmers Steering Committee members paddled together in voyageur canoes on the Mississippi River just south of Hannibal, MO in July. Fish biologists learned how the cover crops were doing on local farms and farmers learned more about Mississippi River fish that their conservation practices were protecting. What made this event unique was the opportunity for open discussion between agriculture and conservationists about how best management practices such as managed grazing and cover crops improve farms and fish and wildlife habitat. Fishers & Farmers Partnership hopes to take the lessons learned at this event and apply them across the Upper Mississippi River Basin. Thanks to the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Missouri Department of Conservation, and Big Muddy Adventures for making this learning experience possible.
During 2016, invited leaders of local projects in agricultural watersheds of the five Upper Mississippi River states—Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin—are participating two, three-day workshops. The first was held at Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center near Lanesboro, Minn. The second will be held November 28-31 at the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium in Dubuque, IA. The 25 participants at Eagle Bluff included farmers, landowners, watershed project coordinators, community volunteers, consulting agriculture and conservation advisors, and agency representatives. The group is focusing on real change at the local level, asking: What do we do in our own farm operations, and how do we organize near home to improve water quality and sustain successful farms?

Watershed Leaders Network workshops are funded by The McKnight Foundation. Project communications are developed with funds provided by the Charles & Verna Schmidt Foundation. Both are Minnesota-based family foundations.

To find inspiration for work in your area, to access resources, or to learn more about the Watershed Leaders Network and Fishers & Farmers Partnership, fishersandfarmers.org.

**SELECTED WATERSHEDS AND LEADERS**

Boone River Watershed Project, Des Moines River Basin, north central Iowa  
Farmers Of Mill Creek Watershed, Wisconsin River Basin, north central Wisconsin  
Hewitt Creek Watershed Project, Maquoketa River Basin, northeast Iowa  
Indian Creek Watershed Project, Illinois River Basin, north central Illinois  
Jo Daviess County Water Partnership, Galena River Basin, northwest Illinois  
Kickapoo River Watershed Initiative, Kickapoo River Basin, southwest Wisconsin  
Le Sueur River Watershed, Minnesota River Basin, southwest Minnesota  
Lime Creek Watershed Project, Cedar River Basin, northeast Iowa  
North Fork Salt River, Salt River Basin, northeast Missouri  
Peno Creek Watershed, Salt River Basin, northeast Missouri  
Root River Field To Stream Partnership, Root River Basin, southeast Minnesota  
Seven Mile Creek Watershed Project, Minnesota River Basin, south central Minnesota  
Yahara Pride Farms, Yahara River Basin, south central Wisconsin
Fishers & Farmers Coordinator, Heidi Keuler met with Matt Lechner from the U.S. Forest Service, and Donovan Henry, Coordinator for the Ohio River Basin Fish Habitat Partnership, in August to view two FFP projects in southern Illinois funded with National Fish Habitat Partnership funding. The Big Muddy Project south of Carbondale, IL, was completed in August.

Working with a nearby farmer, the US Forest Service and partners restored 62 ac of wetland habitat including 36 ac private land and 26 ac public land. Three water control structures were installed to allow the fall rains to flood these areas during migration, and then these wetlands can be lowered for late spring planting. The second portion of project worked with Ducks Unlimited to restore a 30 ac oxbow lake and seasonal button bush wetland along Big Muddy River. Big Muddy #10 Project is an effort to stabilize soil, restore hydrology, enhance wetland habitat, and decrease sediment and nutrient rich runoff into the Big Muddy and Mississippi Rivers.

Partners:
Farmer adjacent to Forest Service lands
Shawnee National Forest
Ducks Unlimited
Fishers & Farmers Partnership
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
**Cannon River Watershed Partnership Buffer Field Day**

Rice Creek, a tributary of the Cannon River in Minnesota, is the only trout stream in Rice County. The stream supports a naturally reproducing brook trout population, but is listed as an impaired stream in an agriculture-dominated (84%) watershed. In order to protect the brook trout and water quality of the stream, Cannon River Watershed Partnership (CRWP) applied for and received a Fishers & Farmers grant in 2014. The goal of the grant/project is to engage more farmers in conservation practices including cover crops, strip-till practices, conservation drainage, and buffers through demonstration projects and outreach events.

On August 23, 2016, CRWP held a Rice Creek Buffer Field Day on Mike and Julie Daly’s Farm near Northfield, MN to provide information about Minnesota’s new buffer law and why it’s so important to Rice Creek its population of brook trout. The event drew a crowd of about 50-75 farmers, neighbors and watershed residents.

Tom Coffman (USDA-NRCS) presented USDA buffer practices and programs (CRP & EQIP), Travis Hirman (Rice SWCD) spoke about the new perennial buffer rule and buffer mapping project, and Heidi Keuler showed how buffers work through a hands-on stream table demonstration. Participants also viewed and discussed two buffer sites over a walking tour and provided lunch. Fishers & Farmers Partnership thanks the Daly family, CRWP, Rice County SWCD, and NRCS for hosting this great informational and inspiring event.

Minnesota’s new buffer law requires landowners to set aside a 50-ft buffer along rivers and streams and a 16.5-ft buffer along public ditches to help filter out nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources released a Buffer Protection Map in July, 2016. More details can be found: [www.dnr.state.mn.us/buffers/index](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/buffers/index).

13 inch Rice Creek brook trout sampled by MN DNR (Waterville Fisheries Office) a few days after the field day.