



Arkansas and Oklahoma Native Pollinator Workshop Speaker Biographies

Jennifer Hopwood, Midwest Pollinator Conservation Specialist, Xerces Society

As the Xerces Society's Midwest pollinator conservation specialist, Jennifer provides resources and training for pollinator habitat management, creation, and restoration to agricultural professionals and land managers. Jennifer holds a Master's in Entomology from the University of Kansas, and has been involved in research focused on bee communities in roadside plantings, prairie remnants, forests, and community gardens. Prior to joining Xerces, Jennifer taught at a community college and assisted with research examining the effects of grassland management on insects. Jennifer lives in Michigan, where she serves on the advisory board for the Michigan Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program.

Alayna Jacobs, Assistant Manager, Booneville Plant Materials Center

Alayna grew up in Silver City, New Mexico, where her family has owned and operated a daily newspaper for the past 78 years. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Arizona with a major in Rangeland Ecology and Management with a minor in Plant Sciences from the University of Arizona. She has worked for the US Forest Service mapping large-scale vegetation communities in New Mexico, and has assisted in the development and testing of native grasses at the NRCS Tucson Plant Materials Center. She has also worked with landowners, federal and state land management agencies, and conservation groups as an NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist in southeastern Arizona. She relocated to Fayetteville, AR in 2010 to become a Soil Conservationist in the Washington County Field Office. She accepted a Conservation Agronomist position serving as the Booneville Plant Materials Center Assistant Manager in October 2011. She began her Master's program dealing with switchgrass biofuels production at the University of Arkansas in the fall of 2012.

Rudy Rice, Chairman, Native Pollinators in Agriculture Project

Rudy is a semi-retired dairy and grain farmer from DuQuoine, IL, and has been actively involved in the conservation movement since 1974. Rudy served as the President of the Illinois Conservation Districts from 1988-1992 and President of the National Association of Conservation Districts from 1998-2001. He also has served the local farm bureau in the Perry County Extension Board. He is a graduate of Southern Illinois University's School of Agriculture and serves on the Dean's Agricultural Advisory Board. Rudy is presently serving as president of the National Conservation Foundation, serves on the Shawnee Resource Conservation and Development board, and has been chair of the Native Pollinators in Agriculture Project since its inception. He is active in his local church and married to Mara, with 3 children and 6 grandchildren.

Mike Thralls, Oklahoma Conservation Commission

Mike Thralls became executive director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on Oct. 20, 1997. Prior to that he served as assistant commissioner of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture. Under Mike's leadership, Oklahoma's first state-funded Conservation Cost-Share Program became operational in 1998 and has helped hundreds of Oklahomans install conservation practices to improve water quality and reduce soil erosion. The state's first Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) was initiated in 2007, the largest program to help protect nonpoint source water quality protection in the state's history.

Mike received a Bachelor of Science degree from Oklahoma State University in 1973. He received an FFA American Farmer Degree in 1971, the Noble County Soil Conservation Award in 1978, and was named Outstanding Young Farmer and Rancher in 1980 by the Oklahoma Farm Bureau. He served 10 years on the Billings Board of Education, served on the board of regents for Northern Oklahoma College from 1989 to 1991 and is a graduate of Leadership Oklahoma Class I in 1988. Thralls served as vice chairman on Governor Frank Keating's Animal Waste and Water Quality Protection Task Force in 1997. He is a member of the Noble County Cattlemen's Association, Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association and Oklahoma Farm Bureau.

Andrew Wargo III, Former President, Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts

Andrew is the past president of the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts. He has been a business agent for Baxter Land Company since 1969. He is responsible for the operation of the farm(15,000 acres), warehouse, and cotton gin; design, construction, electrification, and water systems of fish ponds(1200 acres); coordination and execution of landlord/ tenant functions, compliance with all Farm Service Agency Programs; compliance with Environmental Protection Agency requirements, compliance with Arkansas State Plant Board requirements, selection of and participation in Conservation Reserve Programs, marketing decisions, and membership in/ support of Producer Organizations. Prior to that, he was a teacher and principal in Rohwer, AR, a professional pilot and flight instructor in Clarksdale, MS, and an enlisted officer in the Mississippi Army National Guard (Retired Lt.).

Randy Young, Arkansas Natural Resources Commission

Randy Young has been with the Commission for over forty years. In 1971, he was hired as an entry level Water Resources Engineer. In 1985, he was appointed Chief Executive by Governor Bill Clinton, and has continued to support Arkansas in this capacity through the administrations of Governor Jim Guy Tucker, Governor Mike Huckabee, and Governor Mike Beebe.

He oversees a staff of about ninety employees responsible for efficient water resource development, conservation, and management. He also serves as a member of the Pollution Control and Ecology Commission and as the Executive Secretary of the Arkansas Water Well Construction Commission.

Randy holds a B.S. in Agricultural Engineering and an M.S. in Environmental Engineering from the University of Arkansas and is a registered Professional Engineer. He enjoys watching sports, fishing, hunting, raising mules, ranching, and spending time with his granddaughters.