UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Prairie Research Institute
Illinois State Water Survey
2204 Griffith Drive, MC-674
Champaign, IL 61820

Training Name: 2026 Virtual Operator Conference
Dates: February 3-5, 2026
Times: 10:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Central
Format: Four 1-hour workshops each day
Registration Link: https://event.gotowebinar.com/event/5e5b5c68-b7b0-44d0-804a-4da101ba906c

Primary Contact:

Jennifer Wilson
Illinois State Water Survey at the Prairie Research Institute
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
2204 Griffith Drive
Champaign, IL 61820
Email: jswilson@illinois.edu
Cell Phone: (217) 778-4054

Sponsors:
Illinois State Water Survey - The Illinois State Water Survey (ISWS) is a division of the Prairie Research Institute at the University of Illinois. The Water Survey's scientists conduct state-of-the-art research and collect, analyze, archive, and disseminate high-quality, objective data and technical information. The Water Survey's data, services, and expertise provide a sound technical basis for the people and policymakers of Illinois to make decisions.

Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) - The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) is a national network of non-profit partners working to provide technical assistance, training, resources, and support to rural communities across every state, the U.S. territories, and tribal lands. Through RCAP's regional partners, more than 350 technical assistance providers (TAPs) build long-term, trusted relationships with thousands of communities across the country.

Training Description:
This virtual training conference offers drinking water operators a chance to learn more about timely topics, improve fundamental skills, and get support for specific challenges while earning CEU credit to maintain their license. While there is no substitute for in-person training, this virtual event was created to specifically target operators of small and rural public water systems who may not have the means or ability to travel. Conference instructors are technical assistance providers from the RCAP network. The event is funded by a grant from the U.S. EPA for technical assistance and training of water operators.

Agenda:

Day 1: February 3, 2026

10:30 a.m. CST	**Opening Welcome**
10:45 a.m. CST	**The History of Water Regulations** *Alexis Nank, Communities Unlimited*
	Understanding the history of water system regulations is essential because these rules directly protect public health, the environment, and community well-being. For water professionals, knowledge of these regulations ensures compliance, reduces risk, and builds trust with the communities they serve. In this session we will discuss how these regulations came to be and explore key milestones from the 19th century to current-day regulations.
	Alexis Nank is a Community Infrastructure Management Technician from Alabama who has been with Communities Unlimited since 2024. She graduated from Troy University with a Master's Degree in Environmental Science.
11:45 a.m. CST	Break
11:55 a.m. CST	**Small System Water Treatment** *Erin Vincent, Rural Community Assistance Corporation*
	This course will cover the common contaminants of water systems and how they are treated.
	Erin Vincent is a Small Utility Project Consultant at RCAC, where she works primarily with schools to connect them to grants providing no-cost bottled water and/or updated drinking fountains. She holds a B.S. in Marine Biology and a M.A. in Education, before RCAC she worked as a Small Water Systems Operator for 5 years in Three Rivers, CA.
12:55 p.m. CST	Break
1:05 p.m CST	**Fundamentals of Drinking Water Distribution** *Alejandro Toledo-Garcia, Great Lakes Community Action Partnership*
	This session provides operators of all skill levels with an in-depth exploration of critical water distribution concepts. Attendees will follow the path of drinking water as it makes its way from source to customer, all while learning about the infrastructure and principles associated with each step of the distribution process. Topics include: source waters, water storage, distribution math, disinfection and contact time, head pressure, and more.
	Alejandro Toledo-Garcia is an RCAP Operator providing technical assistance to water and wastewater systems in the state of Michigan. Alejandro has been with

	GLCAP since 2025 and is a licensed water operator. He graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Utah and is fluent in both English and Spanish.
2:05 p.m. CST	Break
2:15 p.m. CST	**Disinfection Byproducts** *Faymon Roberts, Great Lakes Community Action Partnership*
	This session includes a brief overview of Disinfection Byproducts (DBPs) in Drinking Water. It examines how DBPs are formed in drinking water along with rules, regulations, and guidelines related to monitoring DBPs. The session concludes with mitigation techniques for controlling DBPs.
	Faymon holds Ohio Class III Water Supply and Class III Wastewater Works operator licenses and was previously licensed as a Class II Laboratory Analyst. In 2004, the Ohio Rural Water Association picked him as the "Operator of the Year". He has taught many operator courses over the years for OTCO, Ohio Rural Water, the WET Program at Greene County Adult Career Center and the West Virginia Environmental Training Center.
3:15 p.m. CST	Closing Reminders

Day 2: February 4, 2026

10:30 a.m. CST	**Opening Welcome**
10:45 a.m. CST	**Asset Management Plans** *Jessica Hester, Communities Unlimited*
	Asset Management Plans assist systems with a forecasted budget to prevent system failures, and prioritizes assets repairs and or replacements by urgency, that can be utilized for inventory management. In this session, operators will receive an understanding of how to complete an asset management plan for water and wastewater systems. This training will provide recommendations and possible funding opportunities with an approved asset management plan, which should be implemented with your annual budget and review water and wastewater rate annually to incorporate the five-year forecast budget. This session will also highlight how an Asset Management Plan could be utilized for mitigation during any possible natural disasters.
	Jessica Hester is a Community Infrastructure Management Advisor from Texas who has been with Communities Unlimited since 2023. She is a Class C Ground Water Treatment Operator and Class D Wastewater Treatment Operator, whose previous experience included Chief Operator position. She specializes in Cross Connection Program, Asset Management, FEMA Public Assistance, and TCEQ Compliance.

11:45 a.m. CST	Break
11:55 a.m. CST	**Asset Management Framework: Five Core Questions** *Sabrina Straus, Rural Community Assistance Corporation*
	Taking a proactive approach to asset management helps utilities stay ahead of problems, extend the life of their infrastructure, and make smarter financial decisions. In this session, operators will learn practical tools to navigate the asset management process, communicate effectively with decision-makers and the public, and plan for the long-term needs of the systems they serve. Participants will be guided through the five core questions of the asset management framework (Current State of Assets, Level of Service, Criticality, Life Cycle Cost, and Long-Term Funding Plan), gaining actionable insights to strengthen operations and planning.
	Sabrina Straus is a Small Utility Consultant I at RCAC. She assists small drinking water and wastewater utilities in Oregon navigating funding opportunities and compliance requirements. Sabrina holds an M.S. in Environmental Science from the University of West Florida and previously worked in the Compliance Assurance Program at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Her background with compliance, research, and teaching helps her translate complex requirements into workable solutions.
12:55 p.m. CST	Break
1:05 p.m. CST	**Asset Management that Water Operators Use** *Marshall Hammond, Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project*
	A practical, operator-first approach to asset management. This session will show how to: (1) identify your most critical assets, (2) score risk with simple 1–5 "likelihood × consequence" scales, and (3) translate top risks into targeted preventive maintenance actions and a defendable 5-year plan—so you cut emergencies, protect water quality, and talk budgets with confidence. No handouts needed; it's all demonstrated in the presentation.
	Marshall Hammond serves as a Technical Assistance Provider (TAP) for the Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project (SERCAP) in Maryland, where he provides hands-on support to rural communities in developing and maintaining essential water and wastewater infrastructure. Drawing on his technical expertise and field experience, he assists with site evaluations, regulatory compliance, and sustainable infrastructure solutions to improve public health and environmental quality. A Baltimore native, Marshall brings extensive knowledge of the wastewater industry and a strong understanding of environmental regulations across the Mid-Atlantic region. He earned his B.S. in Environmental Science from Roanoke College in Virginia, where he developed a deep familiarity with rural and urban infrastructure challenges.
2:05 p.m. CST	Break
2:15 p.m. CST	**Hydrant Assessments for Asset Management**

	Danielle Desmarais, RCAP Solutions
	Hydrants are an important feature of water system asset management plans and GIS mapping data. How do you assess their condition and age? This session will be taught from the experience of completing many drinking water asset management projects and working with firefighters. The learning objectives will be to determine a hydrant's age if the date stamp is hidden or does not exist. The presentation will cover the various popular styles of hydrants by decade and manufacturer and will discuss how assets such as the mains and valves may help solve any unknown hydrant age mysteries. Other learning objectives include how to assess the condition of a hydrant from a visual inspection. We will also cover logging data, such as physical accessibility to the hydrant and knowing the parts of a hydrant for any condition issues.
	Danielle Desmarais (Da-Mare-iss) is a Community Specialist and TAP from Massachusetts who has been with RCAP Solutions since 2021. She graduated from Clark University in Worcester, MA with a Master's Degree in Environmental Science and policy, where she focused on water systems management. She has specialized experience in asset management and capital improvement plans and a certificate in Proper Hydrant Operation & Maintenance from the Massachusetts Water Works Association.
3:15 p.m. CST	Closing Reminders

Day 3: February 5, 2026

10:30 a.m. CST	**Opening Welcome**
10:45 a.m. CST	**GIS and Water System Maintenance** *Andrew Olson, Midwest Assistance Program*
	This session will be an introduction to asset management using GIS technology.
	Andrew Olson is a Technical Assistance Provider with over 10 years working in water and wastewater distribution and treatment.
11:45 a.m. CST	Break
11:55 a.m. CST	**Digital Transformation for Operations & Maintenance Task using GIS** *Kim Rutledge, Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project*
	This session outlines the process of consolidating paper workflows for utility Operations and Maintenance (O&M) through the adoption of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The goal is to transition from traditional paper-based

	methods to a fully digital, map-centric platform using mobile field operations for inspections. Benefits: • Improved accuracy and accessibility of asset data • Streamlined communication between field crews and office staff • Reduced paperwork and redundant data entry • Enhanced compliance reporting for state and federal funding requirements • Data analytics and dashboards for proactive maintenance planning
	Kim Rutledge joined SERCAP in May 2017 as a Technical Assistance Provider (TAP), bringing more than 30 years of experience in water and wastewater utilities with a strong focus on GIS, CAD, and GPS technology integration in both public and private sector mapping environments. In 2019, Kim advanced into the role of GIS Tech Lead, where she established the strategy and standards for a scalable GIS platform that supports end-to-end geospatial workflows and broad content distribution. She leads training initiatives for SERCAP's regional staff and rural communities, ensuring the long-term sustainability of cloud-based GIS solutions and GPS technologies for water and wastewater asset mapping. Kim also plays a key role in supporting compliance and planning efforts, leveraging GIS datasets to enhance Lead Service Line (LSL) Inventories and Asset Management Plans that strengthen infrastructure resilience in the communities SERCAP serves.
12:55 p.m. CST	Break
1:05 p.m. CST	**Corrosion Control and Cathodic Protection** *Lance Goodman, Midwest Assistance Program*
	This session will be an introduction into preventing corrosion by using cathodic protection on water infrastructure assets.
	Lance Goodman is a Technical Assistance Provider with over 20 years working in water distribution and treatment. He holds a license in cathodic protection testing from the Association of Materials Protection and Performance, formally NACE International.
2:05 p.m. CST	Break
2:15 p.m. CST	**Drones** *Madden Bremer, RCAP Solutions*
	This session covers at a high-level several applications of drone technology in the water industry including imagery collection, asset inspection, and leak detection. This content is intended for people with little to no familiarity with drones who may be interested in exploring the feasibility of incorporating new technology into their water system management strategy. The session will also briefly cover details pertinent to obtaining and maintaining the required FAA Part 107 Certification for commercial operations as well as suggested mission protocols.

	Madden joined RCAP Solutions in 2025 as a GIS Specialist. She holds a BA in Environmental Studies from Dickinson College and a MsC in Geo-Information Sciences from Salem State University. Her professional experience ranges from telecom to regional planning as well as commercial drone operations.
3:15 p.m. CST	Closing Reminders

Participation Verification:
In addition to the methods lists below for contact hour calculation, participants must self-certify their identity by consenting to the following language at registration:

> *I consent to sharing my information with WaterOperator.org and to receiving communications about this event and other programs. I understand that my participation and engagement in the event will be monitored for the purposes of determining eligibility and number of hours for a certificate to be provided upon request. I certify that only I, the registrant, will log in using my unique registration link and will participate in an environment conducive for learning.*

Contact Hour Calculation:
Calculation of hours earned will be based on attendance start and end time, active participation in polls presented during each presentation, and completion of an end-of-day survey.

Certificate Issuance:
Certificates will be issued within 2 weeks of the conference's conclusion and be in 1-hour increments, for up to 12 hours, or as otherwise required.

Questions and Feedback:
Written comments and questions during each presentation will be facilitated by a moderator.

Technical Support:
An individual who is not the moderator will monitor the appropriate inbox for any related technical support queries.

Computer-Based Education:
The 2026 Virtual Conference is free and department personnel may register at:
https://event.gotowebinar.com/event/5e5b5c68-b7b0-44d0-804a-4da101ba906c