AMERICA'S WATERSHED INITIATIVE

Retirement Announcement

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October 21, 2026

America's Watershed Initiative Announces Executive Director Kim Lutz's Retirement

The Board of Directors of America's Watershed Initiative (AWI) announces that Executive Director Kim Lutz will retire on April 30, 2027, following nearly seven years of leadership. During her tenure, Kim has helped transform AWI from a board-led organization into a growing organization with a four-person staff and establish it as a respected voice for the health and future of the Mississippi River Watershed.

Telling the Watershed's Story

Kim helped strengthen understanding of the Mississippi River Watershed and the challenges and opportunities that cross its boundaries. Under her leadership, AWI published its second watershed-wide report card, providing a comprehensive assessment of watershed health and highlighting key issues that deserve attention. She and her team have also traveled throughout the basin, bringing partners together to share knowledge, elevate watershed-scale challenges, and advance solutions that benefit rivers and communities across the watershed.

Building the Mississippi River Watershed Partnership

Addressing challenges across the Mississippi River Watershed requires coordination among the many organizations working on water quality, flood risk, wildlife, navigation, and other shared priorities. Recognizing the need for a more coordinated, watershed-wide approach, Kim led AWI's efforts to establish the Mississippi River Watershed Partnership.

What began as an idea rooted in AWI's founding vision has grown into a coalition of more than 600 partners representing federal and state agencies, nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, and industry. Guided by its Leadership Council, the Partnership works to establish shared priorities, build a unified voice, and secure the support and dedicated funding needed to advance projects across the watershed. The Partnership provides a forum for organizations to work across sectors and state lines, identify common priorities, and pursue solutions that individual organizations may not be able to achieve on their own.

Joining the Mississippi River Water Action Collaborative

In 2025, AWI joined the growing Mississippi River Water Action Collaborative (MRWAC), a network advancing water resilience across the basin. Managed by the Pacific Institute, with AWI and LimnoTech as partners, MRWAC connects project implementers with companies and other funders to support high-quality water stewardship projects, including wetland restoration, sustainable agriculture, and green infrastructure. The Collaborative is working toward a 2035 goal and will track and report progress toward basin-wide impact over time.

Sharing Knowledge Across the Basin

In 2025, AWI launched a lunchtime webinar series to connect people across the watershed with leading scientists and basin experts. To date, 18 webinars have attracted more than 1,000 participants, with additional viewers accessing recordings on YouTube. Topics include water quality, flood and drought risk, fish and wildlife conservation, navigation, and recreation.

In 2026, AWI also introduced Watershed Notes, a series of concise, accessible summaries of recent research and programs advancing watershed science and management. By translating technical information into clear, practical takeaways, Watershed Notes helps connect emerging knowledge with the people who can put it to use, including agency leaders, nonprofits, industry, elected officials, researchers, and watershed communities. The first four issues are available online.

Looking Ahead

Kim leaves AWI with a stronger organizational foundation, a growing network of partners, new platforms for sharing knowledge, and greater momentum for coordinated action across the Mississippi River Watershed.

"Kim has put her heart and energy into building AWI and bringing people together around a shared vision for the Mississippi River Watershed," said Rachel Orf, Chair of the AWI Board of Directors. "I've seen firsthand how much persistence, relationship-building, and commitment it takes to turn an ambitious idea into a working partnership. Kim has helped make that happen, and AWI is stronger and better positioned for the future because of her leadership. We are grateful for all she has given to this organization and look forward to celebrating her contributions in the months ahead."

"I'm incredibly proud of what we've built together over the past seven years," said Kim Lutz. "AWI's greatest strength has always been its ability to bring people together across sectors and state lines to focus on the future of the entire Mississippi River Watershed. None of this would have been possible without the commitment of our board, staff, and the many partners who share this vision. I'm grateful to have been part of this work and confident that AWI and its partners will continue to make a difference for the rivers and communities that depend on a healthy watershed."

The Board of Directors will begin its search for a new Executive Director in November 2026, with the goal of filling the position by April 1, 2027, allowing for a transition before Kim's retirement at the end of April.