

# ---CONSERVATION DISTRICTS OF IOWA (CDI)---

## CONNECTIONS

The Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) informs, educates, and leads Iowans through our local soil and water conservation districts to promote conservation of natural resources.



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### From: CDI President Dennis Carney

My best wishes to all of you involved in the noble pursuit of protecting and enhancing our state's natural resources. In light of the current health pandemic, our CDI staff and Board of Directors have been busy this past month revamping our programming to better support you.

**We recently completed the CDI Commissioner Handbook revisions.** Content was updated and condensed. Electronic links to the Iowa Code were added. The handbook will be a valuable reference for all newly elected commissioners as they learn about their duties and responsibilities. I urge all current commissioners to read the handbook as well; I think you will find it to be a good review. The handbook has been sent to all conservation assistants and will be posted on the CDI website.

**Unfortunately, our annual Legislative Day at the Capitol will not be possible in 2021.** We distributed information about holding virtual legislative meetings with your district's representatives in Des Moines. Additionally, we announced that **CDI will pay the \$50 registration fee for Iowa commissioners to attend** the virtual annual meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). This is a wonderful opportunity to attend the national meeting and support NACD's President Tim Palmer from the comfort of your own home. **NACD will hold its business meeting on February 1-5, 2021**, and convention programs will be held on February 8-10, 2021. For additional information, including registration, refer to the information sheet supplied to your conservation assistant.

*Season's greetings from staff and friends  
at the Conservation Districts of Iowa!*



**From all of us at CDI, we hope you will have a safe and happy Holiday Season!** We're devoted to supporting your continued success helping restore and sustain Iowa's natural resources – from promoting soil health and water quality, to advancing urban and rural partnerships and to protecting Iowa wildlife and recreation areas. **We share your commitment to making 2021 a milestone year in the history of Iowa conservation.** We hope you will find time to reflect during this season of good will and sharing on the many blessings we enjoy from the land we work, and from the people who make that land the most productive in the world.

## Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

We have announced the rules for the 2021 poster contest on our website. The theme for 2021 is **“Healthy Forests – Healthy Communities”**. We did alter the due dates for 2021 taking into consideration that there are many schools in Iowa that are still online only, and we want to ensure that all students have the chance to enter the contest (*see below for more information*). The final judging is now scheduled for the board meeting held in conjunction with the annual meeting. Please encourage your local schools to participate. [Check our website to review rules for 2021.](#)

CDI President Dennis Carney offered to do a major revision of the **Commissioner Handbook** in order to bring language up to date. That work is now completed and is [posted on our website](#). We have also emailed this to everyone, as well as providing it to the CAs for your reference. This is a good reference for new commissioners and can also be a great reminder for those who have served for a while. There is a tremendous amount of good information in the handbook and I recommend that you read it at least once each year.

The Executive Committee met and decided that since we budget funds for the President and some staff to attend NACD events that **we could use these funds to pay for more commissioners’ participation in the NACD annual meeting**. At this time, most of NACD events which had been planned for face-to-face in the first half of 2021 have been moved to virtual events. The annual meeting which had been scheduled to be held in New Orleans is now one of those virtual events. I would encourage you to **take advantage of CDI paying your registration** and attend as many of these virtual meetings as you can. This is our opportunity to support Tim Palmer, the first ever NACD President from Iowa, as he completes his term.

**Please use the packet of instructions** to host a virtual legislative meeting with your respective legislators. They do want to hear from you and may be looking at important soil conservation and water quality legislation this year. A group of by-partisan legislators has been meeting periodically to discuss soil health legislation which is one of CDI’s priorities for 2021. Hosting a virtual meeting with your legislators is a great way to reinforce the need for this important legislation. **Please have a safe and happy holiday!**

### Q/A: Dates and formats for the CDI/NACD 2021 Annual Poster Contest



**Why was the deadline pushed back a month to April 23?** Dates were moved back two months for 2021 due to **ongoing concerns of the pandemic**. There may be schools that do not have a chance to submit their posters by the earlier deadline. We do not want kids to be left out. For 2022, deadlines will go back to the original timeframes.

**Why is the deadline June 25 for districts to get their posters to regional director?** The deadline for the regional directors was because **May is potentially a busy month for farming**. The goal is to be fair to everyone while still working to protect everyone, as well.

**How should posters be submitted to the regional director?** On Friday, June 25, 2021, the local SWCD chooses one county winner from each of the five grade categories to **ELECTRONICALLY submit to their CDI Regional Director via email** with a Photo of Each Winning Poster, their Poster Contest Entry Form, and a completed District Winners Form. When sending the electronic poster submissions to your regional director, we ask districts to please save the posters as **“age category/First Name/Last Name” (Example: “2\_John Doe”)** so we may correctly identify the artist of each poster.

## Fayette SWCD chair turns conventional tillage neighbors into cover crop customers

A teacher once told Don Bahe, **“Whatever you do, somebody’s watching.”** That may be the marketing slogan for a business venture which grew from his passion for promoting soil health on his own farm operation into helping his Fayette county neighbors do the same. “We farm in an excellent area – good people, nice neighbors,” says Bahe. “And they look over the fence. We were the guinea pigs. They can see our ground has gotten nothing but better.”



Fayette SWCD Chair Don Bahe

Bahe, in his fifth year with the Fayette SWCD, serves as district chair and was recently reelected. Twenty years ago, Bahe took advantage of an NRCS incentive program to try no-till for three years. Soon after, he put in his first row of cover crops. Today, Bahe and his sons work farm operations totaling 1600 acres (“I’m the little guy,” he says) that are **100% no-till**. The Bahe family liked what they saw. So did some of their neighbors. “One of my sons came up with the idea of **‘Farmers Helping Farmers’**. We bought a 20ft drill and started putting in cover crops for folks.” Four years ago (at a considerable investment!) the Bahes added a 40ft drill.

**“We probably work on 15-20 different farms a year,” says Bahe.** “We’re helping the other farmer out doing custom seeding for cover crops – we plant their custom crop for them. We’re picking up another 300 acres this year. The money you spend on machinery and tillage is not necessary if you can wrap your mind around what we’re doing. We’re seeing a lot of people dip their toe in it.” **Bahe estimates the 40ft drill has planted 9600 acres of cover crops in the last four years.** “This is one of these fun jobs, a feel-good job. When you get the call from a neighbor, ‘The field is ready to go!’, that’s a good feeling. Is it a cure-all? No. But it sure serves its purpose.” At this point, he is not aware of any other operator in the area offering the same service. “It’s a leap of faith for farmers to do this, and we’re starting to see farmers going halfway. We’re seeing changes. This is the way it’s going to be,” says Bahe. “It’s getting easier to convince people. **But it’s more of an evolution than a revolution!** But at least something is going on, and what we’re doing is part of that. You feel good when you pull out of a field.”

## State: Derecho flattened a quarter of Iowa’s forest

By Perry Beeman, Iowa Capital Dispatch

The August derecho destroyed a quarter of Iowa’s already sparse forest land, state officials reported Thursday. The Department of Natural Resources plans to sell salvaged timber from at least six parks. The windstorm, which approximated a hurricane at times with winds up to 126 mph on state lands, also **robbed Cedar Rapids of half its tree canopy**, said Pete Hildreth, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources’ newly installed Conservation and Recreation Division administrator. **Statewide, Iowa lost 724,000 acres of forest in the storm**, Hildreth told the governor-appointed Natural Resource Commission at its meeting Thursday morning. The U.S. Department of Agriculture had estimated Iowa’s forest at 2.9 million acres before the storm, meaning **the state lost just shy of 25% of its forest acres.**



Photo: Perry Beeman, Iowa Capital Dispatch

**Allamakee SWCD grant helps fund On-Farm Trial project**

**Interseeding Cover Crops Early Could Solve Fall Establishment Issues**

by Jason Johnson, State Public Affairs Specialist, USDA-NRCS, Des Moines



*Eric Novey (l.) talks with Postville farmer and project participant Aarik Deering*

After years of struggling to consistently establish cover crops in the fall on cropland in Iowa’s northern tier counties, **more than a dozen Allamakee County producers are participating in a new USDA-sponsored soil health demonstration project that – after one growing season – is showing promising results.** USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) awarded the Allamakee Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) \$236,000 through a three-year grant to lead, manage, and analyze a series of data from interseeding cover crops at the V4-V7 corn growth stages (June).

**Demonstration Details**

Fifteen Allamakee County producers participated in the Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) On-Farm Soil Health Demonstration Trials in 2020 – the first year of the grant. **Most participants planted four interseeded 30-inch corn row plots and four 30-inch corn row plots with no interseeding.** Each plot was at least the width of a combine and at least 300 feet long. Producers planted a cover crop mix between corn rows at the V4-V7 corn growth stage, choosing from four different seed mixes, which included species such as ryegrass, buckwheat, brassicas, and cow peas. Participants used various cover crop seeding methods, including a no-till drill, broadcast spreader, Monosem planter, and various custom air seeders.

**Analyzing Year 1 Results**

Farmers completed a minimum of four replicated strip trials on each demonstration site. Eric Novey, project coordinator for the Allamakee SWCD, is working with producers to collect data. He is evaluating yields, cover crop biomass, nutrient uptake, soil microbiology, soil loss, and several soil health measures using the Haney Test. **Farmers completed a minimum of four replicated strip trials on each demonstration site.** A sampling of Year 1 results:

- **Corn Yields** – Plots that were interseeded with cover crops yielded slightly better than plots with no cover crops (188 bushels per acre, compared to 187). Ten of the 15 participants produced better corn yields in fields with cover crops.
- **Cover Crop Biomass** – Novey measured biomass monthly beginning in July and continued through September. Data collected indicates a sharp increase in biomass from July to August (400 lbs./acre to 525 lbs./acre) then a slower rate of increase from August to September (550 lbs./acre).
- **Soil Temperatures** – Novey says cover crops kept soil temps more consistent during the growing season. “The seeded strips were slightly cooler in the summer, but what was more noticeable was the seeded strips had fewer extremes in temperature,” he said.

On-Farm Trial projects feature collaboration between NRCS and partners to implement on-the-ground conservation activities and then evaluate their impact. Incentive payments are provided to producers to offset the risk of implementing innovative approaches. [Click here to read Jason Johnson’s complete article.](#)