

# ---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.



**May 2023**  
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### **From: CDI President Ramona Nitz**

Earlier this week, I traveled down to Jester Park near Des Moines for the annual state Envirothon competition. I've been going down for years now because I cannot pass up the chance to meet some of the best and brightest teens in our state. This year certainly didn't disappoint. The teams did great and I got to present the top award to a team that won by the highest margin ever. And, because this team was made up of all juniors in high school, they said that they'd be back again next year!

As I looked at all the smiling faces in the crowd as I presented the awards, I couldn't help but wonder if any of them would be receiving a scholarship next month from their local SWCD. I decided it was pretty likely that that would happen. One or more of them may even win a regional or state scholarship.

Along with the poster contest and the Envirothon, giving out these scholarships each year is a big part of what CDI does to educate our Iowa students. Money for these scholarships is raised mostly through the auction held each year at the annual conference. Since becoming president of CDI, I've found that many districts choose to send in a check to the office rather than donate an auction item. Either way, we do need full participation to make this happen. Please be aware that the time for conference is fast approaching. How will your SWCD decide to participate this year? Donating something special for the live auction? Something for the silent auction? A monetary donation?

Next month, I will once again have the pleasure of seeing the proud and excited look on the faces of scholarship recipients. It's thanks to you commissioners that I get to see these smiles! I can't wait!

Ramona

***Inside: "Soil & Water Conservation Week" special edition! See how SWCDs statewide brought the importance of soil and water quality to their communities.***

## Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

I believe we had good timing for Soil and Water Conservation Week. Farmers were in the field where they could see the need to protect our soil. A dust storm in Illinois caused a traffic accident which tragically ended six lives last week due to dry windy conditions and then toward the end of the week, they could see the devastation caused by sudden heavy rain.

Cover crops protecting the bare soil would have prevented both of those outcomes. Unfortunately, those grim reminders of how we too often treat the land that feeds us went unnoticed. As SWCD commissioners, conservation professionals and leaders, we see the need to have every week be dedicated to conserving our soil and protecting water quality. We see the need to always have living roots in the soil, both because living roots keep the soil where it is supposed to be and because those same living roots keep nutrients out of our rivers and other water bodies.

One of my agronomy professors at Iowa State began a discussion about weeds by saying that corn was a weed if it was in a soybean field. A weed is a plant out of place and nutrients we use for crop production become pollutants when they are in our water. Thank you for being leaders in conservation, believing that we can do better.

## *CDI Poster Contest participation certificate now available for download*

A versionable “Certificate of Participation” for all those young Iowa artists participating in the 2023 CDI Poster Contest can now be downloaded from the CDI website. Hundreds of entries have already been sorted and judged, and we encourage all to be sure to award those students who took the time and made the effort to create their version of the theme for this year – “One Water” – with recognition. For more information on next steps in the contest, please go to [2023 Poster Contest](#). Download direct here: [Participation Certificate](#).



# *IDALS Highlights from Soil and Water Conservation Week*

**By Vince Sitzmann**

**IDALS Mines and Minerals Bureau Chief**

Soil and Water Conservation Week (SWCW) is always a great way to recognize all the great conservation work that private landowners, SWCDs, IDALS and NRCS staff, and other Iowan's have accomplished. This year was no exception as it seemed to garner a lot of attention based on social media posts from Des Moines Water Works, ISU Extension, Farm Bureau and other partners as well as TV and media press all around the state! Below is a list of activities IDALS was involved with throughout the week.

**Monday, May 1<sup>st</sup>** IDALS kicked off SWCW with a news release highlighting the governor's proclamation signing and recognizing the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nation's first State Cost Share program and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy.



*IDALS staff volunteer for Stream Clean-up at Prospect Park in Des Moines. (Photo IDALS)*

**Tuesday, May 2** The Mines and Minerals Bureau celebrated with a field day at an old surface coal mine that was mined between the 1930's - 1960's. The site is scheduled to be reclaimed in 2024. The event was attended by 100 people interested in learning about the AML program and was highlighted by speakers from the Office of Surface Mine Reclamation and Enforcement, Marionette Miller-Meeks, and a tour of the 84-acre site.

**Wednesday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>** Secretary Naig announced that IDALS awarded 2.8 million in Water Quality Initiative (WQI) funding from the Conservation Infrastructure Program (CIP) to urban projects across the state. The overall cost of the 16 projects is expected to be approximately \$14.6 million, which includes \$2.8 million from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and \$11.8 million from local sources.

**Thursday, May 4<sup>th</sup>** Secretary Naig and Division Director Susan Kozak attended a Cattle and Conservation Working Lands Project kickoff event sponsored by the Cherokee SWCD. The project highlighted how conservation practices can be economically viable for farmers and cattle producers while also helping to protect water quality and increase the quantity of forage-based crops.

**Friday, May 5<sup>th</sup>** IDALS staff participated in a volunteer stream Clean-up at Prospect Park in Des Moines. The annual stream and park clean-up event is planned via the Des Moines Parks and Rec Volunteer Program. IDALS would like to thank all the SWCDs who sponsored an event or activity in their district. What a great way to celebrate all of your accomplishments!



***“Cattle & Conservation Project” expands to northwest Iowa***

**Five districts receive WQI funding to help restore marginal land**

A challenge met by Taylor SWCD commissioners in 2015 to help growers bring unproductive land to life has now grown to include five new counties in northwest Iowa. During a special “Soil & Water Conservation Week” event held in Cherokee and hosted by CDI President and Cherokee district commissioner Ramona Nitz, state officials announced funding is now available to establish “Cattle & Conservation Project” practices in Carroll, Guthrie, Cherokee, Ida and Woodbury counties.

IDALS Division Director Susan Kozak told the visiting audience that the Cattle & Conservation Project is a regional conservation partnership grant with USDA and NRCS. “The project that started with Taylor and Page counties was so successful as a demonstration project that we plan to expand to cattle country up here,” said Kozak.

The RCPP funding will eventually bring \$5.8 million dollars from NRCS and matching \$5 million from IDALS. “That’s what RCPP is,” said Kozak. “It’s a federal opportunity to make different things happen down at the local level and get different partners involved, look at different ideas that what we traditionally been doing for soil conservation, and trying new things.” The Taylor county project started in 2015, focusing on unprofitable acres. Working individually with producers, district staff were able to provide alternative practices to those acres.

*“We’re going to continue to do the things that are tried and true – those types of things that have served us so well for decades – and then we’re going to try some new things, new ways to deliver practices as well.”*

*--Secretary Mike Naig*

area and you’ve got something that works. This is about trying to elevate every acre of ground in this state to its highest and best use – and that’s different from farm to farm, and field to field, and that’s what this project’s all about – the compatibility of cattle and conservation. It works.”

Naig noted that Iowa is celebrating 50 years of soil cost share in the state of Iowa, and 10 years of Iowa nutrient reduction strategy – that success possible because of the continuing collaboration of partners in the process. “I can stand here before you on Soil and Water Conservation Week and tell you with absolute certainty there has never been more conservation work getting done – actually getting done – in the state of Iowa as there is today.”



*Iowa Ag Secretary Mike Naig*

# A journey around the state for 2023 Soil and Water Conservation Week!

## Adair



**5<sup>th</sup> Grade Conservation Field Day in Greenfield! Clockwise from top left:** judging effects of soil from different levels of care; testing equipment in outdoor exercise; District Forester Lindsey Barney educating about trees and offering free take-home saplings; Bryan Hayes from Iowa DNR Fisheries reviews the species found in Iowa lakes and rivers; meeting a rescued owl.





## Appanoose



**WEDNESDAY**

Charles Moore, Appanoose County SWCD Commissioner and Bradley Gardner, District Conservationist NRCS, were on Appanoose AM the morning of May 3rd helping listeners learn about the background and goals of Soil & Water Conservation Week.

## Cedar



Cedar County SWCD held 'Tree's for Threes' presentations at all Cedar County third grade classes. Each child received a sapling, and the district donated a copy of "Under My Tree" by Muriel Tallandier to each school library. *Right:* Sarah Subbert of Cedar County Conservation demonstrates proper planting. *Above:* Durant Elementary School with Subbert and CA Marcy McBride holding a copy of the donated book.





# Guthrie



*Guthrie SWCD commissioner Jamie Patrick (left) presenting soil health activity sheets to Michelle Spack (right) of GC Elementary to hand out to the kids during SWCW. The following week, Guthrie SWCD commissioners will do a soil health presentation at GC Elementary's Outdoor Day.*

# Howard



Howard SWCD purchased and distributed 70 Spruce trees on Arbor Day to third graders at Howard-Winneshiek and Notre Dame schools. Students were given instructions on how to plant their new trees and reminded about the importance of trees for soil health and water quality. *Pictured behind students:* Kathy Moen, NRCS Resource Conservationist and Shannon Hurd, IDALS Conservation Assistant. *Below, left and right:* The SWCD also hosted its 44th annual Natural Resources Day Outdoor Classroom at the Prairie's Edge Nature Center with 76 fifth graders from the Howard-Winneshiek and Notre Dame schools.





# Ida

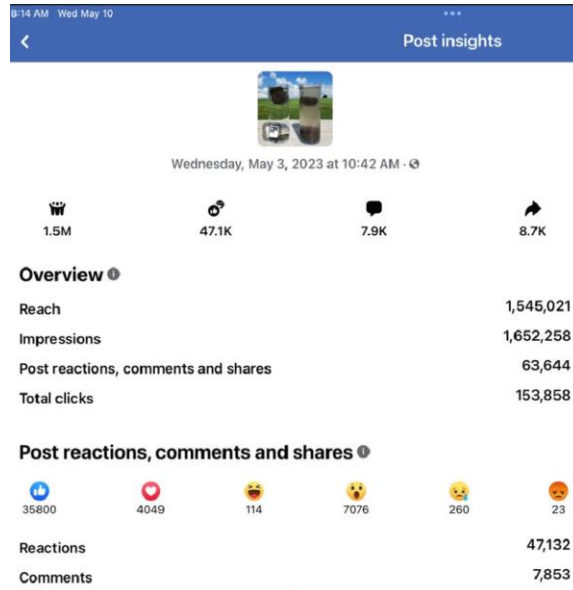


**Ida SWCD sponsored in-class education and demonstrations, emphasizing the importance of soils and value of trees. *Top: 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Tree Planting; top right and bottom: 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Erosion and Flooding Activity; bottom right: 5<sup>th</sup> grade tree planting.***





# Jasper



On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, Jasper SWCD posted on Facebook a slake test picture and short explanation of the test components, with amazing results in public interest, more than 1.6 million impressions, generating a large amount of awareness and conversations garnered by such a simple post. Check out the Facebook post at [Jasper County Soil and Water Conservation District | Newton IA | Facebook](#). An article in the [Newton Daily News on May 5th](#) explains how our prairie farm operation helps the county.

# Madison



**Top left:** Madison CA Anna Golightly hosting guests and answering questions at their May 5<sup>th</sup> event; **top right:** Ruth Blomquist, NRCS SW Area Soil Health Specialist, demonstrates effects of rain on various soil conditions; **bottom left:** visitors experiment with manipulating water movement with the stream table.





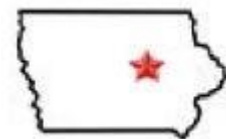
# Sioux



Sioux County SWCD received 397 posters this year from 7 different schools both public and private in Sioux County. Cash prizes and ribbons are awarded to all county and school winners. *Above:* Sioux SWCD displayed all the winning posters in the Centre Mall in Sioux Center. *Right:* The district presented 700 trees to Third Grade students in Sioux County. There are 14 elementary schools, both public & private, and all schools participate in this program.



# Tama



*Above:* Fifth graders from six school districts attended Tama SWCD's annual Outdoor Classroom. Students rotated through nine concurrent classes: Oh Deer (a wildlife population dynamics game), Wildlife, Reptiles, Soils, Recycling, Prairies, Fishing and Boating Safety, Forestry and Water Quality. *Right:* Tama SWCD delivered white pine seedlings to sixth graders at South Tama, Meskwaki Settlement, Green Mountain-Garwin, Gladbrook-Reinbeck, Union, and North Tama Schools.





## Wayne



*Above left: Wayne SWCD Poster Contest Winners – 88 posters were submitted from three different school districts in the county. Above and at left: Wayne SWCD distributed trees to the 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in Wayne County's three school districts.*

## Winneshiek



Winneshiek SWCD published an article in the Decorah Public Opinion about the no till planter purchased by the Winneshiek SWCD around 1970 which was rented to farmers to try the practice. The son of a former SWCD Commissioner bought the planter in 1976 and still has it. Click here: [Celebrating the history of 'no-till' soil stewardship - Driftless Multimedia LLC \(driftlessjournal.com\)](http://driftlessjournal.com).

