

---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.



January 2024
Volume 5, Number 4

CDI EXECUTIVE BOARD:

President: Jeri Thornsberry
Vice-President: Don Elsbernd
Treasurer: Jack Boyer
Secretary: Paul Ackley
Past President: Ramona Nitz

CDI OFFICE STAFF:

Executive Director: Dien Judge
Program Manager: Carlee Sabus
Communications: Joe Hayes

Office Phone: 515-289-8300

Office Address:

Conservation Districts of Iowa
2015 Grand Ave. (Box #15)
Des Moines, IA. 50312

Website: <https://cdiowa.org>

From: President Jeri Thornsberry

Our Iowa Conservation Partnership Day is just a week away—February 8 at the Capitol Rotunda from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. By now, commissioners should have received a Commissioner's Packet with tools for each of you to use to reach out to your elected representatives, either by post or email. *(See page 8 for schedule.)*

Our elected representatives want to hear from us and this year we have a strong message regarding the increased conservation funding and a 'once in a generation' opportunity to increase the number of installed practices. My hope is that we have a great crowd and are able to inform and educate our legislators about the important and vital work we do.

Right after Partnership Day, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) will hold its annual meeting in San Diego. This year Iowa is the only state from eight Midwest states in the North Central Region that will defend two resolutions voted on by commissioners in our annual meeting last August.

The first is changing the minimum age of properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places from 50 years to 100 years. The second one is to allow and provide for cost share for restored or created wetlands on any existing or planned CRP acres.

Don Elsbernd, VP and Dien Judge, Executive Director will join me at this annual meeting. Wish us luck. If the NACD body supports these two Iowa resolutions, national rule changes are possible.

Hope to see you all at the Capitol on Thursday, February 8. Our voices do count—after all we represent 500 constituents across Iowa. 2024 is our year to make a difference.

Executive Director Report – Dien Judge

The Iowa Legislature is in session, and that means our leaders need to hear from us. Please take some time to reach out to your local legislator and let them know how important soil and water conservation programs are in protecting our precious natural resources. Plan to attend Iowa Conservation Partnership Day at the Capitol on Thursday, Feb. 8.

This warming weather makes us think of Spring, and of course...Spring Regionals! Please mark your calendars and plan to attend your Spring Regional meeting. We now have the dates, locations and times of each of the nine Spring Regional meetings, and we hope you can join us to talk about the issues that are important to you. These regional meetings are a great way for commissioners to gather together with our partners in person for in-depth conversations about soil and water conservation.

Spring Regional morning sessions typically are held from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM with lunch provided, and evening sessions typically are held from 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM with dinner provided. Some exceptions to these times may be made, so watch for future announcements about your Spring Regional meeting.

The first of the Spring Regional meetings will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 27 in Region 5 in Atlantic and then in Region 8 in Afton. On Wednesday, Feb. 28 we will have meetings in Region 7 in Muscatine and in Region 9 in Fairfield. Then on Thursday, Feb. 29, we will hold a meeting in Region 6 in Adel.

The following week, the Region 4 meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 5 in Peosta. On Wednesday, March 6, the Region 3 meeting will be held in the morning in Garner, and the Region 2 meeting will be held in the evening in Algona. The last of the Spring Regional meetings will be held in Region 1 in the morning in Ashton.

Please keep these dates in mind, and plan to attend your Spring Regional meeting. And come prepared to discuss conservation topics that are important to you.

CDI Spring Regionals 2024

| Region | SWCD Host Location | Date & Time | Venue |
|--------|--------------------|--------------------|---|
| 1 | Osceola | 3/7/2024 (10a-2p) | Ashton Legion Building, 323 3rd St. Ashton |
| 2 | Kossuth | 3/6/2024 (4p-8p) | Water's Edge Nature Center, 1010 250th St. Algona |
| 3 | Hancock | 3/6/2024 (10a-2p) | USDA Service Center, 255 Hwy 69 S, Garner |
| 4 | Dubuque | 3/5/2024 (10a-2p) | NE IA Community College Peosta Campus Conference room, 8342 N Peosta |
| 5 | Cass | 2/27/2024 (10a-2p) | Cass County Community Center, 805 West 10th Street, Atlantic |
| 6 | Dallas | 2/29/2024 (10a-2p) | DMACC Farm, 25749 N Ave. (US-169), Adel |
| 7 | Muscatine | 2/28/2024 (10a-2p) | Environmental Learning Center, 3300 Cedar St., Muscatine |
| 8 | Union | 2/27/2024 (4p-8p) | 3 Mile Lake Lodge, 1542 Campground Road, Afton |
| 9 | Jefferson | 2/28/2024 (4p-8p) | Jefferson Co. Fairgrounds, Cambridge Learning Center, 2606 W Burlington Street, Fairfield |

Boone SWCD launches website presence ... and the surprise? It's *easy* to start, *easy* to manage, *easy* on the budget!

Launching a web presence may seem technically intimidating, expensive, and a time-consuming process for most, including those with expansive knowledge about preserving the soil, less so about internet programming protocols. Most Iowa conservation district staff and leadership know developing a website would be a vital resource for their constituents. And as some are discovering – not as difficult as it once was!

How Boone SWCD moved into their own address in the cyberspace neighborhood, where anyone can visit, is a trip worth taking for all districts with a shared need to expand local connectivity.

“One goal of our 5-year plan is ‘improve awareness of, and involvement with, Boone SWCD,’” said Boone SWCD Commissioner Steve Carlson. “Part of that goal is building a website for more visibility online. Not a lot of people know about Soil and Water Conservation Districts and what we do.” That had to change.



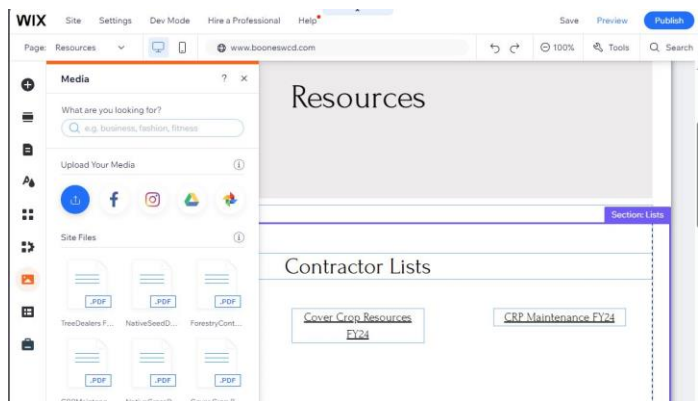
Boone SWCD Commissioner Steve Carlson

“I think having the web presence was simple for us to set up, it fits within our budget, and it just increases our potential reach with the number of landowners that would benefit from our resources and services that we provide,” Carlson said. “It fits in with our 5-year plan in increased reach and presence in the community. So the website is essential to have a landing spot for people to learn about our existence and help make connections that our staff and commissioners can have with the landowner.”

Carlson noted the Boone SWCD has had a Facebook page

for several years – an online presence that was free and easy to start. But, he added, there are numerous limitations to Facebook. “It’s much better to have an actual website that’s searchable, that can be found on Google, and can house all of our resources. So we started to look into the different options.”

Initially, Carlson said, he and district staff explored connecting with organizations already online. “I had heard that some other SWCDs had partnered with the county conservation office, or with their county supervisors – somewhere where there’s already a website and getting a single page on their existing website. We explored that a little bit, but didn’t get very far in terms of what would be the best fit for us, how would the arrangement work, who would have access to update that website.”

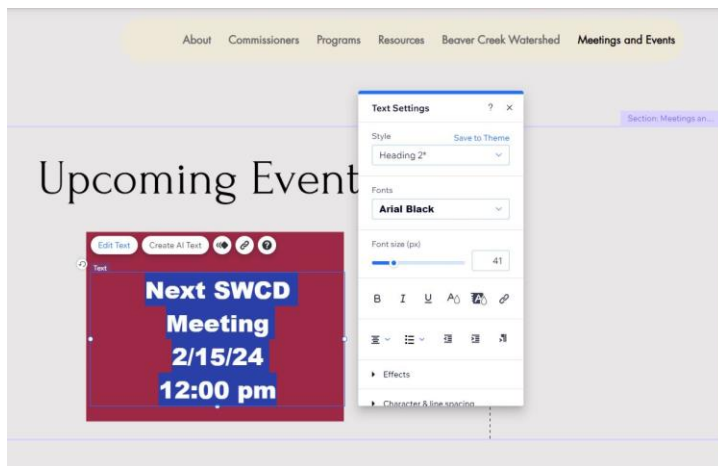


Example of easy upload of new information.

Continued next page

To have control of content with their own URL, it was determined a standalone website would work best for Boone SWCD. After a careful review of options by district staff and interns, the [“WIX” website building platform](#) was chosen as the best fit.

“This was really the most affordable and still simple to use. Getting our own page through WIX has been easy for us to work with, and useful for us to manage on our own,” Carlson said. “We were able to create a mock-up website using WIX to see what it would look like, then we created the domain and made the website payments to go live in early 2023. We pay right around \$200 per year for a pretty basic plan to maintain our website, and we paid less than \$10 per year for our domain name, which we do right through WIX.”



Example of easy content editing.

Carlson noted a few examples of how control of district content and broadening access benefits communications. “This morning I posted an intern job posting as a shareable .pdf. That job posting is now a URL, we can share via email, we can share on Facebook, or when we post job descriptions for Iowa State students. Just being able to link to that because it’s uploaded to the website is a big benefit.” The website now makes nine different contractor lists easily accessible to landowners and farmers. “We realized it would be so much easier to have these housed on the website, instead of printing off and emailing. A producer can find cover crop resources specific to our location, contractors

like forestry consultants, native grass drills, native grass dealers, tree dealers, and others. Before, we had to share these on a case-by-case basis, now we have a spot on the website.” The website also provides convenient overviews of district cost share programs. “A farmer can get basic description of our no-till/strip-till programs and practices that we have on an informational page, with contact information. It’s enough information to pique their interest and reach out to us with specific questions. That’s what we want – to have people call in and have one-on-one conversations with our staff.”

www.booneswcd.com/

And “the other big one” now available for easy public review on the Boone district website, Carlson said: the district 5-yr Soil & Water Resource Conservation Plan. “We offer first an overview of it, and then a link to open the

entire document. All that is publicly available, which is important. It’s a great way for us to maintain transparency with everyone. It’s a document that we’re proud of, so we might as well have it out there.” The WIX platform makes getting this information out to the public easy. “They have tutorials,” Carlson said. “It’s pretty easy. Log in to your website, navigate to the page you want to edit; as you scroll down, you’re able to click on it and just edit the text or add a photo – pretty much point and click, drag and drop.” For other Iowa SWCDs seeking to establish community awareness and improved interaction with critical stakeholders, Carlson said an online presence is essential. “The general public turns to Google and online resources quite a bit for their initial questions, and exploration of things they want to know more about, conservation included. And so not having a web presence, you’re missing out on opportunities to make connections with people in your local county to share the resources that we have available.”

Iowa Envirothon returns to enhance Iowa youth conservation knowledge & experience

By Carlee Sabus
CDI Program Director

We at Conservation Districts of Iowa are excited to welcome the next great group of young lowans from all over the state for our annual competition, a chance for youth to deep dive into valuable environmental and natural resource problem-solving, teambuilding and leadership experiences! And we ask for your help! As district staff and commissioners, we ask for your support to help recruit and guide our young learners through the phases of competition. Will you help us out?



Envirothon challenges students to hone critical thinking skills and create inventive solutions to the complex environmental and natural resource issues facing our world today. Mark your calendars: the Iowa Envirothon state competition will be held **April 29th** at Jester Park. But to get there, teams will first be challenged in Regional competition tests, which in 2024 will be held virtually in an online testing format. These tests will be open to take starting **Monday, March 18th through Friday, March 29th**. We hope you'll share this great chance to take part in a rewarding and fun

group event with your local young people – high school students grades 9-12 or ages 14-19. This will be their chance to meet others from around Iowa who share our passion for conservation and sustainability.

Check online for updates and more information, including registration form, sample study guide and tests, rules and regulations, including a link to the national organization: [Iowa Envirothon 2024](#). For a look at highlight moments at the 2023 competition (including an event video link!): [2023 Envirothon event photos](#).



Envirothon teams on the trail in 2023 competition at Jester Park.

PLEASE ADVISE TEAM LEADERS TO HAVE REGISTRATION FORM AND TEAM MEMBER INFORMATION FORM TURNED IN BY **FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23rd**. You can send these through the mail (address is in my email signature) or you can send them via email to carlee@cdiowa.org. Please let me know if you have any questions, and we're looking forward to another fun and successful Envirothon!

*SWRCP in progress – part two in a series****Insights from the facilitator front lines***

By Alyssa Comer
CDI Planning Coordinator



CDI SE Planner Alyssa Comer

Now that all the districts' 5-year "Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plans" (SWRCPs) have been completed, it's great to see the progress being made, even on the plans that have been recently finished. When I meet with my districts now, it's exciting to see how much they're already getting done utilizing the plan, just a year or two out from finalizing it. Having a written record and visualization of goal completion does wonders in getting community attention and getting people excited about conservation work.

I'm looking forward to the new survey that we put out – the "SWRCP Recognition Program" survey. Those results will be beneficial to getting the word out there on the 5-year plan process and seeing visually how it *does* make a difference. This survey will help for the future of the planning process as it will bring to light any difficulties or roadblocks that districts have had with the 5-year plan and their goals. I'm hoping that when we share the results and give commissioners a chance to speak with each other at the 2024 CDI Annual Conference, it will get people reenergized to continue the 5-year planning process.

Coming out of college having a background in environmental policy and planning, and then going straight into the 5-year plan project with CDI – I felt prepared, but it was also very different. Even though I studied at the University of Iowa, Iowa unfortunately tends to get swept under the rug a little bit. (I'm sure you Cyclones are not surprised about this, ha-ha!) A lot of the policy and public knowledge that we learned in class was not based in Iowa, it was more global and national in scale, rather than "Iowa". Starting this job, I've learned so much with our SWCDs, creating their plans and talking with them about the goals they've implemented. I've seen a lot of practices they've put into place that have been so informative, and taught me how what's happening in Iowa is so critically important.

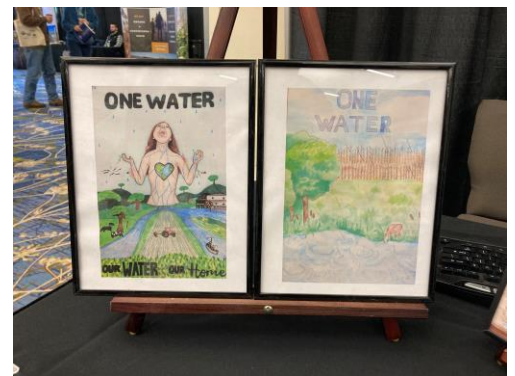
I believe the 5-year plan brought a lot of people's attention to the *necessity* for it – trying to meet Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy goal, reducing our impact on water bodies downstream. Having this plan set in place, and being a legal document, brought those issues to people's attention. That has been good to start – spreading the word and bringing it to the forefront of people's minds. SWCDs continued input and wanting to implement their goals will be helpful in reducing local impact on issues of soil and water quality, as well as encouraging this process in the future. Now it's more important than ever to be thinking about local conservation efforts, especially with the crazy weather we've been having. We know some things are constantly changing. When people are thinking about it, that means we can develop better solutions sooner.

Scholarship applications due to local district February 9, 2024

Scholarship applicants must submit their scholarship applications to the SWCD Office in the county which they reside in. After final selections, the top three scholarships will be awarded at the state level in the amounts of \$3000, \$2000 and \$1000. To review "2024 Conservation Scholarship Rules" and "2024 Scholarship Application", please visit [2024 CDI Scholarship Program](#).

Practical Farmers of Iowa 2024 conference ... a wide-angle view

CDI was just one of many exhibitors at the annual PFI Conference, January 9-10, at its new venue, downtown Des Moines. Hundreds of guests braved the chill and snow, visiting sponsors and benefiting from a wide range of keynote speakers, story tellers, and topical conservation-focused sessions by leading experts.



IOWA CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP DAY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2024

CAPITOL ROTUNDA, DES MOINES, IOWA



SCHEDULE

9:30-10:30 a.m. Briefing Meeting in Wallace Building Main Floor Auditorium

11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. 2024 Iowa Conservation Partnership Day Event

Meet with your legislators. Invite them to lunch.

