----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: President Jeri Thornsberry

This year's Envirothon was another great success! Of the 15 teams that qualified for the state competition held again at Jester Park in Granger, 13 actually competed. The Decorah Nerd Republic (DNR) won the competition again this year and will now participate at the international event in upstate New York in July. This team did such a stellar job that we invited them to present again to everyone in the assembly area at Jester Park with the thought that other teams could pick up some pointers on how to deliver an effective presentation using facts and humor. The members of the 'DNR' team are all seniors. I hope one day that we see one or more of them as members of our conservation family. Many thanks to the Carlee Sabus, Program Manager and other CDI team members who helped out. NRCS, IDALS and IDNR members are our partners in every sense of the word. I love it when we are shoulder to shoulder at events. Demonstrates to others that all our partners are jointly committed to the conservation mission.

As a reminder, 2024 CDI Resolutions were emailed to each CA on April 12. It is time for commissioners to discuss and then vote on the nine submitted resolutions. The 2024 CDI District Resolution Ballot is due to CDI by email admin@cdiowa.org on or before Monday, July 01, 2024 @ 4:00pm. The results of pre-conference voting will be posted on the CDI website by July 10.

I just got back from vacation and the people I was with in Austria/Greece do not listen to or watch <u>any news!</u> I was so sad to hear about Iowa's bad weather especially of the destruction and deaths from the Adair/Greenfield tornado. My heart is heavy.

Take good care everyone.

Executive Director Report – Dien Judge

lowa's weather is always unpredictable, but in many parts of the state the past few weeks have been extremely challenging. We hope you and your family, and your property, are all safe.

The past few weeks at CDI have provided an opportunity to get caught up with some paperwork and to prepare for the events of the summer. We are looking forward to the upcoming 2024 SSCWQC/CDI Annual Conservation Summer Tour. This will be my first Summer Tour, and I'm eager to participate and to see some parts of northwest Iowa. This year's tour will include stops in LeMars, Sutherland, George, Merril and Sioux Center, where we will view conservation efforts and enjoy an opportunity to learn from our colleagues in conservation. If you haven't signed up to participate in the Summer Tour, please do so soon.

It's also time to be thinking about Resolutions. CDI Resolutions are an important way to convey your views on critical issues. Once resolutions have been passed by CDI at our annual conference, they form the official viewpoints of CDI and are shared with decision makers at the state and federal level. Resolution packets were recently sent out, and commissions will conduct pre-conference voting – please have those ballots returned by the first of July.

Speaking of Annual Conference, we're preparing for the 2024 CDI Annual Conference now and decisions will be made soon regarding the agenda items and presentations. If you have suggestions or requests to make your CDI Annual Conference a better experience for everyone, please don't hesitate to reach out to me or your Regional Director.

Reminder dates for 'CDI Poster Contest'

It's clear from the hundreds of proud CDI Poster Contest entries displayed by Iowa SWCDs during "Soil & Water Conservation Week" that our local and regional 'judges' will have a challenging time choosing 'winners' who move on to the next phase. Here are dates to keep in mind! (If you have questions, please contact joe@cdiowa.org).

- Friday, June 21, 2024: 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.
- **Friday July 19, 2024:** CDI Regional Directors will have chosen 45 winners to move on for state consideration, there is one regional winner from each of the 9 regions in each of the 5 categories. CDI Regional Directors will submit to CDI via email a Photo of Each Winning Poster, their Poster Contest Entry Form, the District Winners Form, and the Regional Winners Form.
- August 18, 2024: CDI Regional Directors will choose one state winner from each of the five categories from those 45 regional winners.
- **September 6, 2024:** CDI will announce awards to local SWCD offices who will in turn notify the student, school & local groups.
- **September 2024:** The five state winning posters will be sent to the national poster contest for consideration for a national award. Winners will be announced and posters displayed at the February 2025 NACD Annual Meeting.

Cedar SWCD and Lower Cedar Watershed "Batch & Build" projects

Momentum grows bringing public and private partnerships together, transforming lowa conservation strategies

Bidding is closed. Now comes the best part: "It's going to be a big deal," said Cedar SWCD Commissioner Kent Stuart. "I think they're expecting around a \$500,000 project, the majority in Cedar." In this final week of May, a partnership between the Lower Cedar Watershed WMA, seven SWCDs, IDALs and local authorities will turn months of planning, meetings, negotiating, conversations around tractors in the field and consulting engineers into action: another major lowa 'batch & build' project that goes far to improve local lowa water quality, primarily with bioreactors and saturated buffers.

With contractor bids in hand, announcements to be made in days, Cedar SWCD – geographically the largest district in the Lower Cedar Watershed (LCW) – can expect much to gain from successful batch & build projects that should start turning dirt this summer. According to Commissioner Stuart, Cedar SWCD made promoting batch & build projects a major objective. "I'm just so proud of this district and with the Lower Cedar Watershed area, and all the practices that are on the books that we've put in," Stuart said. "We're proud of all the people stepping forward and saying they'll do this. I just think right now it's been our district's main focus the last couple years – cover crops and the batch & build system, trying to get it up and running."



Heartland Coop Conservation Agronomist Emory Davis surveying prospective conservation practice location. (All photos courtesy Heartland Coop)

Controlling nitrate leakage from tile drain water before it reaches surface waters is a critical conservation goal for Iowa SWCDs, which actively promote and assist in installing bioreactors and saturated buffers that offer effective solutions. With the creation and expansion of the "batch & build" concept, first launched in 2020 by the Polk SWCD, the rate of installation has dramatically increased. In the current project now in review by IDALS, of the 25 saturated buffers planned, 15 will be in Cedar County; every one of the 14 bioreactors planned are slated for Cedar.

Long before bid envelopes get unsealed, months of work in the field and in community halls help sell the idea about these conservation opportunities. Stuart credits Heartland Coop for doing the 'leg work' to get the message out, identify location feasibility, convince farmers to consider participating, and setting up plans for engineers to begin designs.

Emory Davis and William Hoffman are both Conservation Agronomists with Heartland Coop who have been active with batch & build, partnering with IDALS to do edge of field projects such as saturated buffers and bioreactors; Hoffman runs cover crop programs in central lowa.

"We're hired by the watershed," explained Davis. "We work closely with the NRCS offices in those counties to get conservation done and CRP planning. Will and I talk directly with the farmers, ask if they want to participate. We'll go survey the site, work with the engineer, get it approved." The IDALS batch & build program is simple enough, said Davis. "Rather than have the landowner hire the contractor and build the structures, its more efficient to have us go survey dozens of the sites and have one contractor build several of those."

But Stuart emphasizes once a batch & build practice is approved for a landowner (paid 100% by IDALS, typically including a \$1,000 incentive payment), the conservation possibilities just get started. "When we have these meetings with Heartland Coop about the watershed, we typically always dove-tail something else within that, things like pollinator strip planting or riparian buffers, that go beyond what Heartland has working. We can turn a regular CRP acre into an improved CRP acre with a saturated buffer. That farmer can get more money, and then of course expand on that to include pollinator and prairie strips. People can find more value in that same acre when they're doing multiple practices on it.

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"It's a matter of getting out in front of the public, getting someone to take that first step to come in and say, 'Hey, what can I do here?' Well, if they're interested in doing the saturated buffer, for instance, you can very easily say, 'Ok, let's put that into a CRP, if we use some native grass or some pollinator, you can improve the rent on that. So there's ways to dovetail into that. Once they make that first commitment – 'Hey, we should do this!" – it's easier to get that second and third practice involved. That's where the real benefit is, people coming for one thing and then end up thinking, 'Yeah we can do more than just that!'"

At IDALs, Senior Environmental Specialist Tanner Puls confirms IDALS is continuing to expand on the batch & build model and increase the number of batch & build projects around the state. "We continue to ramp up installation," he said. "Going from one of these in Polk county, figuring out where we could gain some efficiencies and how we could get more projects into the ground — now we've got those going with multiple coordinators across the state, a large number of them either going to bid this year or getting ready to bid hopefully next year. Plenty of them going on."

Funding for the installation of the conservation practice and the engineering all come from IDALS, Puls explained. "IDALS is paying for the engineering costs to get the practice designed as well as the installation costs to get the practices in the ground. We've seen a large increase in the number of practices we've been able to get in year-over-



Cedar SWCD Commissioner Kent Stuart welcomes fellow landowners to his farm to review conservation practices and opportunities.

year by using this new batch & build model, and we as a state really think it's something good to build on, something we're going to continue to work toward. We've increased the number of staff at the office who are working on batch & build projects."

That dynamic circle of local authorities, elected officials, state offices, private companies, contractors, engineering firms and landowners working together, uniting to promote sustainability in Iowa soils and waters, is the critical factor for success, said



Center County saturated buffer

Conservation Agronomist Will Hoffman from Heartland Coop. "The name of the game in conversation is partnership," he said. "Partnerships come in all shapes and sizes, and finding common ground even with unlikely partners is really making headway across lowa's landscape."

His colleague Emory Davis agrees. "It takes all kinds of partnerships – public and private. There's enough conservation work in Iowa to go around, so if we work together it will make a bigger impact."

For the commissioners at Cedar SWCD, the state funding, matching funding and on-the-ground relationship-building by partners eases the work ahead. "It's very easy for district commissioners," said Stuart. "We're at the meetings, we hear the presentation, then we say 'yes'. We're not involved with the legwork, we're facilitating the meetings, we're the local faces that people know as commissioners — when they have questions they're going to ask us. But it's very good from the board's perspective to have this relationship with Heartland and IDALS because they do the heavy lifting and we're there to communicate with the farmers in our area. It all comes down to clear water. That's what we're in the business of. It's the great practices that once they're installed, they sit there and work, 24 hours a day, you don't have to babysit them, you just know they're doing their job."

Federal funding increases "once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for conservation"

Hello from the Director!

By Susan Kozak
IDALS Director of Soil Conservation and Water Quality



As I write this article, I am in the middle of a project looking at soil health and water quality benefits when multiple conservation practices are utilized together. I find myself pondering different

ways to implement conservation on the ground. With its expansive fields of corn and soybeans, Iowa has long been a cornerstone of American agriculture. Now, the state is at the forefront of a movement to prioritize soil health and water quality. Farmers across Iowa are adopting conservation practices such as cover crops, no-till farming, and edge of field practices to enhance soil health, improve water quality, and boost overall productivity.

One of the standout practices gaining popularity in Iowa is cover cropping. By planting cover crops like rye or oats during the off-season, farmers protect the soil from erosion, improve water retention, and contribute to water quality improvement efforts in the state. This not only

Iowa Farmers Lead the Way in Soil Conservation Efforts for a Sustainable Future

safeguards the environment but also enhances the long-term viability of the land for future generations. This year, lowa is approaching 4 million acres of cover crops planted across the state – about 13% of the farmed acres. This is a huge increase in cover crop adoption from 10 years ago, but we still have a long way to go. As cover crops gain popularity, we should also look at integrating them with other conservation practices to offer a multitude of benefits, creating a synergistic approach that enhances overall agricultural sustainability.

The success of Iowa's soil conservation efforts is bolstered by strong partner support and collaborative initiatives. State and federal programs provide financial incentives for farmers adopting conservation practices, making it economically viable to invest in sustainable agriculture. Partnerships with key organizations in the state also play a crucial role in disseminating knowledge and best practices. Here at the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship we are proud of the commitment Iowa's farmers have made to soil conservation and water quality, as we work towards a more sustainable and resilient future for agriculture. If you are interested in trying some of these practices on your farm or layering new practices with what you are already doing, please reach out to your local USDA service center for more information.

Decorah team repeats as state winner in the annual 2024 CDI Envirothon competition

Two teams from Decorah, Iowa, had much to cheer at the end of a challenging day competing in the annual "2024 Envirothon®" event, organized by the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) – team "Decorah Nerd Republic" repeated as Iowa's 1st place champion, and team "Decorah Skabush" finished in second place!

The competition, held April 29th at Jester State Park near Granger, is an environmental and natural resources competition for high school students (grades 9-12 or ages 14-19). Students challenge themselves to develop critical thinking skills that create inventive solutions to the complex local and global environmental and natural resource issues facing our world today. During the lowa event, thirteen teams of five members each participated from Charles City (2 teams), Algona FFA, Decorah (2 teams), Muscatine FFA (2 teams), West Lyon FFA, Forest City FFA, Bettendorf, Marshalltown, Eddyville and Nashua-Plainfield.

The 2024 event is sponsored by CDI, Smithfield Foods, Iowa Farm Bureau and the Iowa Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), with support from Iowa Conservation Education Coalition (ICEC). Third place was secured by "Algona FFA", and team "Marshalltown Red" won 4th place. CDI Program Manager Carlee Sabus says this year's annual competition once again welcomed to Envirothon's tough tests and oral presentations another great group of young Iowans from all over the state. "This is always a great chance for our Iowa youth to deep dive into valuable problem-solving, teambuilding and leadership experiences," Sabus says. "Envirothon challenges students to hone critical thinking skills and create inventive solutions to the complex environmental and natural resource issues facing our world today."

The Decorah Nerd Republic team — Aidan Nalean-Carlson, Anders Lovstuen, Connor Evelsizer, Gabe Hiner, Lucas Arendt (alternates Alex McGohan and Henry Weis) — will go on to compete in the international competition, July 28-August 3rd, at Hobart and William Smith College in Geneva, New York. The team is coached by Larry Berland, Allysen Lovstuen assistant coach.

During the Iowa event, thirteen teams of five members each participated from Charles City (2 teams), Algona FFA, Decorah (2 teams), Muscatine FFA (2 teams), West Lyon FFA, Forest City FFA, Bettendorf, Marshalltown, Eddyville and Nashua-Plainfield. Emphasizing hands-on learning and real-world application of concepts, Envirothon students can be found getting their hands dirty in a soil pit, measuring the basal area of a forest, collecting macroinvertebrates in a stream to determine water quality, identifying wildlife tracks and signs, and many other skills and activities used by environmental and natural resource conservation professionals.

Winning teams, pictured with CDI President Jeri Thornsberry: (Starting at the top: Decorah Nerd Republic 1st place; Decorah Skabush 2nd place; Algona FFA 3rd place; Marshalltown Red 4th place. Congratulations!









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"Everyone is a winner here, and Iowa is proud of you all!"

















"We congratulate each and every young person who shared their passion for the environment and lowa's natural resources by joining us at Envirothon," says Program Director Carlee Sabus. "Everyone is a winner here, and lowa is proud of you all!"





Click here to Meet our CDI Envirothon Teams for 2024!

Lillian Howe - 1st place

Fremont SWCD honor local CDI state scholarship winner



Fremont SWCD Commissioner David Roberts presenting Lillian Howe her 1st place CDI scholarship award, announced recently at the Fremont-Mills Senior Awards Night.

Officials with Fremont SWCD presented Lillian Howe of Thurman her award for being selected as the 2024 1st place State Scholarship winner by the nine Regional Directors of the Conservation Districts of Iowa. Lillian will receive \$3,000 to assist with her academic expenses.

Lillian, a senior at Fremont-Mills High School in Tabor, plans to attend Texas Christian University in the fall, majoring in mechanical engineering, with an emphasis in environmental science. Lillian's message for Iowa SWCDs: "Thank you so much for the generous scholarship," she says. "I plan to pursue a career in environmental engineering. I so appreciate the support you are providing as I further my education.

2024 Iowa DNR Private Lands Program



Conservation Districts of Iowa Private Lands staff joined a group of approximately 50 specialists from the Iowa DNR and other partner organizations that gathered in northwest Iowa, May 29, for the 2024 Iowa DNR **Private Lands Program** Meeting. The group visited sites in Cherokee County, including a prairie remnant and two forestry sites, and then did a tour of the Loess Hills WMA. Pictured are CDI Private Lands Specialists (I-r) Mitch Sabers, Joey Hathaway, Katie Fetting, Heather Vetter, Claire Helmke and Janet Borchardt.

A journey around the state for 2024 Soil and Water Conservation Week!

Story





Collins-Maxwell elementary students learn about the importance of wetlands from Water Rocks! presenters.



During the Water Rocks! presentation at Collins-Maxwell Elementary, students played fun, educational games including "Wetland Bingo" pictured here, and "Migration Hopscotch."

Story SWCD Commissioner Steve Riggins was interviewed by Pat Schlarbaum of KHOI radio on Thursday, May 2, about the conservation practices he has put into place on his farm, as well as the work NRCS and IDALS is doing in Story County. Steve is an avid conservationist and has one of the most diverse farms in Story County. He is also very conscious about soil health, and practices all five of the soil health principles on his farm. The interview aired on Friday, May 10, on the morning show.

Story County SWCD helps sponsor *Water Rocks!* school presentations (www.waterrocks.org/). This year the district helped sponsor five Story County school presentations, including a visit to Collins-Maxwell Elementary School on Tuesday, April 30.

Howard





The Howard Soil and Water Conservation District celebrated Soil and Water Conservation Week by distributing 100 Norway Spruce trees for Arbor Day to 3rd graders at the Howard-Winneshiek and Notre Dame schools (pictured above). Students were given a history of Arbor Day, the importance of trees for soil health and water quality, and instructions on how to plant and care for their new trees. The students were very excited to take home their very own trees! (Pictured with students L-R: Shannon Hurd, IDALS Conservation Assistant, and Laura Ellingson, Howard SWCD Technician).



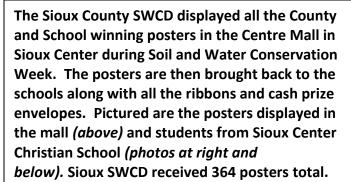


The Howard SWCD also hosted their 45th annual Natural Resources Day Outdoor Classroom at the Prairie's Edge Nature Center with 80 5th graders from the Howard-Winneshiek and Notre Dame schools in attendance. Stations included Entomology presented by Angela Bries from Howard County Conservation, Backyard Conservation with Neil Shaffer from Howard SWCD (above right), Bee Keeping with volunteer Jed Becker, Woodland Plants & Flowers with volunteer Connie Richter (above left), and Soil Health presented by Neil Sass, NRCS Soil Scientist and Kathy Moen, NRCS District Conservationist. Thanks to our station leaders, Howard County Conservation for use of their Nature Center grounds, the bus drivers, fifth-grade teachers, and students for making the day an enjoyable success!

Sioux









Kindergartener Aubrey (left) and 2nd grader Nora with posters.









Students from Sioux Center Christian (above and bottom left) share their posters from this year's Stewardship Week theme: "May the forest be with you always!"

Tama





Tama SWCD received Stewardship Week posters from 34 third and fourth graders. Alexa Rocha-Ayala received the District's top honors with her entry, gleaning her a \$20 prize.



Tama SWCD Commissioner Jan Wobeter with a Union Middle Schooler. Tama SWCD delivered Northern Red Oak seedlings to 322 sixth graders in six school districts.



Tama SWCD hosted 228 fifth graders from five school districts for its 5th Grade Outdoor Classroom (above left) Students spent the day rotating through 20minute classes on a nature walk, wildlife, wildlife population dynamics, soils, prairies, water quality, forestry, fishing and boating safety, and recycling. In the prairies class, Tama County Conservation Board (TCCB) Director Curtis Behrens taught students about the history of prairies in Iowa. The students dug in and got dirty making prairie balls with native forb mix donated by Allendan Seed Company of Winterset (above right). The prairie balls will be utilized by TCCB to improve native species diversity in its native prairie reconstruction plantings. Tama SWCD's 5th Grade Outdoor Classroom has been a nearly-annual tradition since 1974.



Stewardship Week Big Books sets were delivered to the final four of six school districts served by Tama SWCD outreach. (L-R:) South Tama Elementary Library Paraprofessional Deb Llewellyn and Tama SWCD Commissioner Jan Wobeter.

Wayne



The Wayne County Soil and Water Conservation District celebrated their 40th Anniversary of gifting trees to the third-grade classes in Wayne County including Corydon, Morman Trail, and Seymour Schools. Pictured (above) is Mrs. Dell's third grade class in Seymour, joined by Hubert Staggs, Wayne SWCD Vice Chairman and Cami Vande Lune, Iowa Dept. of Agriculture Conservation Assistant. Also pictured (below left) is Staggs and Sherry Trower, Wayne County's previous Conservation Assistant of 30+ years, in the early years when the district first started gifting trees.





Wayne SWCD Vice Chairman Staggs addressing 3rd graders in Seymour.

Cherokee

Our Cherokee DC Nick Livermore went on our local radio station's "What's Happening" show and talked about some of the activities our District has been working on and some of the programs we offer. We had ordered some small packets of Pollinator North American Native Wildflower Mix to give out to the elementary students in our county's four schools, but those haven't arrived yet so we will be doing that at a later date!

Guthrie



Guthrie SWCD commissioners presented some NACD activity sheets to Guthrie Center Elementary School yesterday. David Deardorff and Cletus Steensen made the presentation of materials for all the kids in grades K through 6th. Elementary School Secretary Michelle Spack and three kids from the second grade class were on hand to receive the activity sheets. Guthrie SWCD has made this presentation annually for many years now. Something the kids and commissioners always look forward to!

Adair

Adair SWCD did our annual 5th Grade Field Day for Soil and Water Conservation Week. We had 8 stations, followed by a presentation by the ISU Insect Zoo. Check our <u>Facebook</u> page!



A local helicopter applicator telling the students about the helicopter.



Aaron Schroeder teaching the students about water quality.



Students are digging through owl pellets.



(L.) Megan Messerole brought different spearpoints for the students to look at. (R.) Ruth Blomquist shows students how to protect soil with the Rainfall Simulator.



Lindsey Barney educates students how to identify trees by their nuts and leaves.



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ISU Insect Zoo brought all sorts of creatures including a Madagascar Hissing Cockroach (left), and Rosie, a 17-year-old tarantula! (right).

"Pods of Potential"

Monthly podcast series provides conservation and research opportunities that maximize productivity

Are you interested in connecting with more conservation opportunities? Or do you want to hear from experienced farmers and state experts about how they implement conservation on their ag land? If so, check out the "Pods of Potential" podcast series! This partnership between the Iowa Soybean Association and Iowa Agribusiness Radio Network is driven to deliver results and opportunities to maximize farmers sustainability, profitability, and productivity.

To hear about cover crop implementation and termination, listen to Episode 2 and Episode 6, respectively. Both episodes dive into the details of cover crop management with a farmer and conservation agronomist. If you're interested in saturated buffers and other edge-of-field practices, check out Episode 4! Or if tile water monitoring is top of mind, listen to Episode 7 to hear from a state-wide expert on results and on-going opportunities to improve water quality.



The Pods of Potential podcast is published monthly and will continue to provide on-going conservation and research opportunities. This podcast can also be found on Spotify, Amazon Music, and Apple Podcast platforms. Add this series to your list of resources and share with others who may be interested as well!

Links:

- Pods of Potential Episode 2: https://www.iasoybeans.com/newsroom/audio/pods-of-potential-what-to-expect-with-cover-crops
- Pods of Potential Episode 4: https://www.iasoybeans.com/newsroom/audio/pods-of-potential-improving-water-quality-with-saturated-buffers
- Pods of Potential Episode 6: https://www.iasoybeans.com/newsroom/audio/pods-of-potential-implementing-and-terminating-cover-crops
- Pods of Potential Episode 7: https://www.iasoybeans.com/newsroom/audio/pods-of-potential-monitoring-water-to-improve-nutrient-retention
- Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/show/4YN0700o5fyJFBW4zcim5s
- Amazon Music: https://music.amazon.com/podcasts/74b6b6de-06d1-4796-a11b-54d07de3bcb1/pods-of-potential

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