

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.



November 2024
Volume 6, Number 1

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From: President Jeri Thornsberry

A Blessed Thanksgiving to All!

As we reflect on the many blessings in our lives, let us cultivate a habit of gratitude for the many privileges we enjoy living in Iowa. Let us all take a moment to be thankful for the beauty and abundance of nature that surrounds us here.

Congratulations to Our Newly Elected Commissioners

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to all the newly elected commissioners, and a big thank you to those who stood for re-election. The work ahead in the conservation sector is vital, and we must continue to join together to ensure our shared success. Many in Iowa depend on our efforts, yet many are unaware of the critical work we do. It's time we think about how we communicate and highlight the essential role we play in preserving our natural resources here at home.

Update on Federal Legislation

Unfortunately, there's not much good news regarding the passage of a farm bill during this Congress. The Continuing Resolution expires on December 20. Hence, there is still critical work to be done during the remaining session. Focus will probably be on a farm bill extension and disaster spending package. The goal of most conservation groups is to move the remaining funds in the Inflation Reduction Act into farm bill before the Trump administration begins. This incorporation of funds will increase the farm bill base. The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) has a stellar bipartisan reputation. Current focus is on meeting and educating new Congress members on the role of conservation districts. The NACD Executive Board will meet with key decision-makers to reinforce the role of districts and the importance of not only passing a bill but also protecting conservation funding.

Here is NACD's take on filling positions on the Ag Committees:

Sen. John Boozman (R-AR) will become the Chair of the Senate Ag committee and

Rep. GT Thompson (R-PA) will retain his position as Chair of House Ag committee.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) is expected to replace Sen.

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Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) after her retirement. Rep. Benny Thompson (D-MI) may be a candidate to replace Rep. David Scott (D-GA) in the event he steps down. Also regarding the USDA transition: Many names have been mentioned for Secretary and the priorities of the next USDA are likely to be dictated by this selection.

Key Dates to Note for 2025

Be sure to mark your calendars for these important dates in 2025:

- **Spring Regionals:** February 25, 26, 27 and March 4, 5, 6 (Locations TBA)
- **Partnership Day at the Capitol:** March 11
- **Iowa Soil and Water Conservation Week** April 27 – May 4
- **State Envirothon at Jester Park Nature Center, Polk County:** April 28
- **Annual Conference at Gateway Hotel & Conference Center, Ames:** August 25 and 26

As I’ve mentioned before, we encourage commissioners to attend two key meetings: their local Spring Regionals and the Annual Conference. These meetings are an excellent opportunity to learn about key developments from our partners and to network with fellow commissioners. Constituents in your respective counties will appreciate your up-to-date knowledge on key conservation issues.

2025 Poster Contest Theme

We are excited to announce that the theme for the 2025 Poster Contest is “**Home is Where the Habitat Is.**” This theme highlights the crucial role of both natural and managed habitats in sustaining our environment. Details will be available soon on the CDI website: Cdiowa.org

My Wishes for the Holidays

As the holiday season approaches, my wish for each of you is that you find great joy in your celebrations, no matter how you choose to observe them. And most importantly, may peace prevail on Earth.

Executive Director Report – Dien Judge

Election Day is now behind us, and we are starting to see a clearer picture of what the Iowa Legislature and the US Congress might focus on in the new year. It’s important to note that CDI works directly with Iowa legislators through a highly experienced professional lobbying firm to carry your voice and your concerns to the lawmakers and decision makers in state government. At the national level, CDI works hand-in-hand with the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), and we work at the regional level with the NACD North Central Region. This connection with NACD carries your voice and concerns directly to members of Congress. Iowa’s Congressional delegation will not be changing after the November elections, and CDI will continue to make your concerns known at the federal level, including participation in the NACD Spring Fly-In to Washington, D.C. in March. This will be a critical time, as we anticipate the new Congress will be working on the urgently-needed new Farm Bill. CDI will continue to push for Iowa’s conservation priorities. CDI continues to fill important positions in our three programs. If you or any of your partners know of someone looking to work in the field of soil and water conservation, please send them our way. There are job opportunities in these programs, and we’re looking for qualified applicants. Please check <https://www.cdiowa.org/who-we-are/job-openings/> for more information about job opportunities with CDI (*see below*).

CDI Job Opportunities:

[Conservation Wetland Specialist - Thompson, IA](#)

[Land and Water Conservationist - Estherville, IA](#)

[Land and Water Conservationist - Corning, IA](#)

[Wetland Engineering Technician - Atlantic, IA](#)

[Wetland Engineering Technician - Fairfield, IA](#)

[Wetland Engineering Technician - Northwood, IA](#)

[Wetland Engineering Technician - Spirit Lake, IA](#)

[CDI Administrative Support Specialist - Bloomfield, IA](#)

Secretary Naig announces appointments to the SSCWC

Committee will provide input on water quality and soil conservation programs

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig announced last week the appointment of Iowans to serve on the State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee. The Committee promotes the adoption of proven water quality practices and provides expert advice and input related to technical and financial assistance programs administered by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

“Accelerating the adoption of practices that improve water quality and protect our soil is a significant ongoing focus of the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship,” said Secretary Naig. “We are continually innovating, recruiting new partners, and looking for the best ways to efficiently get more conservation work done, and so we value the perspectives, ideas, and input of these passionate stakeholders. I appreciate their willingness to serve as we all work together to improve our water and conserve our soil in the years ahead.” The Committee has existed since 1939, but today’s meeting in Des Moines was the first since the Iowa Legislature modernized its mission, scope, and membership during the 2024 session.

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THE NEWLY APPOINTED State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee gathered in Des Moines on Wednesday, Nov. 20 for their first meeting since the Iowa Legislature modified its mission in the 2024 session. From left to right, back row: Kent Stuart, Mike McGhee, Ashley Utt, Colleen Miller, Dennis Carlson, Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship Soil Conservation and Water Quality Division Director Susan Kozak. Front row: Luke Monat, Ramona Nitz, Steve Hofmann, Judy Kerns.

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Previously, nine members were appointed to six-year terms by the Governor and were subject to confirmation by the Iowa Senate. The updated committee membership now includes 12 members appointed to two-year terms by the Iowa Secretary of Agriculture.

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The members include six farmer members from geographic regions of Iowa, including at least one who specializes in tree farming. Additional membership includes an elected Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioner, a representative of the state’s mining industry, a member who resides in a city or town, a representative of an organization working in conservation or outdoor recreation, a representative of agribusiness, and a representative of an engineering or land contracting business that works on conservation projects. The Committee will also have ex-officio members from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach (Extension), the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The Committee will meet quarterly, and each meeting will include a topical presentation related to the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship’s Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality. They will provide important feedback related to the Department’s soil and water programs and assist with outreach efforts to spur new ideas or partnerships to explore.

The meetings will also provide an opportunity for interaction with the core conservation partnerships of the Department, which includes NRCS, Conservation Districts of Iowa, Extension and DNR. The Committee also hosts a summer conservation tour, an annual tradition that dates back more than four decades. While there is currently one vacancy for a Southwest Iowa Farmer that will be filled soon, the following members, appointed by Secretary Naig, are listed in alphabetical order by last name:

<p>Bruce Barnhart Melbourne Representative of Agribusiness</p> <p>Dennis Carlson Hampton North Central Iowa Farmer and Tree Farmer Representative</p> <p>Steve Hofmann Lamoni South Central Iowa Farmer</p> <p>Jody Kerns Edgewood Northeast Iowa Farmer and Tree Farmer Representative</p> <p>Mike McGhee Indianola Representative from a City or Town</p> <p>Colleen Miller Albert City Northwest Iowa Farmer</p>	<p>Luke Monat Urbandale Representative from Engineering Firm or Land Contracting Industry</p> <p>Ramona Nitz Cherokee Representative from a Soil and Water Conservation District</p> <p>Kent Stuart West Branch Southeast Iowa Farmer</p> <p>John Tuthill DeWitt Representative of Iowa’s Mining Industry</p> <p>Ashley Utt Bloomfield Representative of an Organization involved in Conservation or Outdoor Recreation</p>
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CDI Planning Coordinators are on the job assisting SWCDs with 5-year plans

Planning Coordinators Conley and Davis will work with SWCDs and local partners to achieve planning goals

As announced last month, CDI and the NRCS have entered into a new five-year agreement that aims to rejuvenate the *Soil & Water Resource Conservation Plan (SWRCP)* project, already established in each of the districts in Iowa.



Regan Davis, CD Planning Coordinator

CDI Planning Coordinator Madison Conley and newly hired CDI Planning Coordinator Regan Davis are embarking on a five-year mission to assist SWCDs achieve their planning goals.

“CDI offers these services to SWCDs to facilitate the planning process, and I’m excited to work with commissioners, district staff, partners and community members to organize local working groups. These efforts will make for better conservation plans. It’s great to have community input in these plans. It’s a really great opportunity all around,” said Conley. “I think this process is extremely valuable. It allows each commissioner to have their voice added into the framework for conservation over the next five years. It’s ultimately beneficial for the commissioners and the community.”

Conley also emphasized that this process will be somewhat different from the planning program of the previous six years.

Since all 100 Iowa SWCDs have all completed their plans, “nothing needs to be started from scratch,” she said. “This process will be about updating and improving the existing plans with the input of Local Working Groups.”

New CDI Planning Coordinator Regan Davis is excited about getting the process started.

“In talking to my first counties in the last few weeks, it’s been a great opportunity to introduce myself and also to learn about the different conservation issues faced by various parts of the state of Iowa,” said Davis. “I think I have a knack for connecting the public with the natural world. With my passion for conservation, I’m ready to assist districts with these planning efforts.”

Conley will be working mostly with districts in northeastern and southeastern Iowa, and Davis will be working with districts in northwestern and southwestern Iowa.



Madison Conley, CDI Planning Coordinator

2025 CDI Scholarship applications are available

Conservation Districts of Iowa's 2025 scholarship applications are now available, and have been distributed to SWCDs around Iowa.

Iowa high school class of 2025 students pursuing programs of study in any field of conservation or agriculture qualifies for the CDI scholarship. The application is available at www.cdiowa.org and can be downloaded from the website.

Applicants must submit their scholarship applications to the SWCD office in the county in which they reside. Each local SWCD will choose a county application to forward to their CDI Regional Director. The regional director will choose an application to forward on for consideration at the state level.

In April, 2025, a judging team of CDI officers, regional directors and alternates will make the final decisions. Scholarship applications are judged based on the following criteria: 20 points for Involvement, Leadership and Character; 20 points for Career; 30 points for Scholastic Achievement; 30 points for Conservation Message.

CDI will make the announcements about the winning applicants on Friday, May 2. After the final selections, the top three scholarships will be awarded at the state level in the amounts of \$3,000, \$2,000 and \$1,000. Winners from the remaining six regions will each receive \$500.

First, second and third place awards will be paid directly to the applicant's school of choice in two equal installments, one upon enrollment at the beginning of the year and the second at midterm. The six other scholarships will be paid directly to the applicant's school of choice in one installment

Iowa House Committee Chairs announced

Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley announced last week the thirteen new committee chairs and two new standing committees for the 2025 Legislative Session.

Rep. Mike Sexton (R-Rockwell City) will chair the House Agriculture Committee, and Rep. Derek Wulf (R-Hudson) will chair the House Natural Resources Committee. The Agriculture and Natural Resources Appropriations Committee will be chaired by Rep. Norlin Mommsen (R-DeWitt).

Horizon II program seeks acres in southern Iowa for "Prairie-to-Energy Initiative"

The Horizon II project has funding available for 39,000 acres of highly erodible land in southern Iowa and northern Missouri. The project seeks to build wildlife habitat, help the environment and use sustainably harvested native prairie feedstock to create Renewable Natural Gas. There is also funding available to incentivize planting 40,000 acres of winter-hardy cereal rye cover crops which will also be harvested for renewable natural gas production. For more information, go to roesleinalternativeenergy.com.