

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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Volume 7, Number 2

CDI EXECUTIVE BOARD:

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CDI OFFICE STAFF:

Executive Director: Dien Judge

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

Last week, I had the honor of representing Iowa at the National Association of Conservation Districts, where I served as Iowa's delegate. The meeting was held in Salt Lake City, with a mild 40-degree temperature, setting the stage for a meaningful gathering. This year's theme was "Bee the Change," inspired by Utah's state symbol, the Beehive, which represents working together mirroring the state's motto of Industry.

Throughout the event, NACD highlighted the importance of partnership and collaboration in conservation efforts. With increasingly severe weather events impacting our country, it is more vital than ever that we work together to implement conservation practices and protect our land.

However, the funding freeze enacted by the administration has had serious consequences. As a result, CDI furloughed 38 of 39 employees. On February 14, I received an unexpected email notifying me that a grant in Black Hawk County had been canceled. Strangely, no one in the NRCS chain of command had been informed. These funding cuts and terminations of federal employees, along with the cancellation of agreements, are deeply impacting our districts.

It's becoming more difficult to provide vital services to both our rural and urban communities.

Despite these challenges, I remain hopeful. I believe we've just hit a large pothole in the road, but our tires are still intact, and we will keep going. 2025 is a year of celebrations: NRCS will mark its 90th anniversary this April, IDALS is celebrating 56 years, and many districts will celebrate their 80th anniversary this year.

The work of conservation is never-ending. We get knocked down, but we always rise again. We will continue standing strong, no matter the obstacles.

Our Spring Regionals begin next week, and now is the perfect time to get involved. Your voice has never been more important. Join us and make a difference!

And then meet me at – **Continued on Page 2**

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the Capitol in Des Moines on Wednesday, March 11 for our annual Partnership Day where we meet with our elected representatives. Since they work for us, our voices should mean something to them. See you there.

Executive Director Report – Dien Judge

On Tuesday, February 11, Conservation Districts of Iowa made the difficult decision to lay off 38 employees. Under three grant agreements through the USDA-NRCS, Conservation Districts of Iowa is supposed to be reimbursed for the payroll costs of these employees.

CDI is currently waiting for tens of thousands of dollars in reimbursements from these grant agreements, and we have received no clear guidance from NRCS about when these reimbursements will be paid. Our hope is that this issue will be resolved soon, our grant invoices will be paid, and we can bring our people back to work.

The positions on layoff include: 24 Administrative Support Specialists; 5 Land & Water Conservationists; 3 Conservation Wetland Specialists; 3 Wetland Engineering Technicians; 2 Conservation Planning Coordinators; 1 Program Manager.

These folks have been stationed all around the state of Iowa, working hand-in-hand with farmers, landowners and our partners at the local, state and federal level to make soil & water conservation projects happen for the good of our state.

Please contact your Senators and Representatives and let them know that these employees do good work for Iowa, and we want them to get back on the job.

Senator Charles Grassley -Phone: (202) 224-3744

Senator Joni Ernst -Phone: (202) 224-3254

Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks -Phone: (202) 225-6576

Rep. Ashley Hinson -Phone: (202) 225-2911

Rep. Zach Nunn -Phone: (202) 225-5476

Rep. Randy Feenstra -Phone: (202) 225-4426

Important dates – mark your calendars

- **Spring Regionals** - Feb. 25-March 6
- **Conservation Partnership Day at the Capitol** - Tuesday, March 11
- **Local SWCDs forward winning scholarship to their Regional Director** – March 14
- **Regional Directors choose and send their regional scholarship winner to CDI** – March 28
- **SWCDs submit their Resolutions to CDI** – March 28
- **Poster contest entries due to local SWCD office** – April 25
- **Soil & Water Conservation Week** – April 27-May 4
- **Pre-conference resolutions ballots due to CDI office** – July 1
- **CDI Annual Conference** – Aug. 25-26

See you at Spring Regionals

Annual meetings a great way for commissioners to network

Conservation Districts of Iowa’s annual Spring Regionals meetings will kick off tomorrow, Tuesday, February 25 with the Region 5 meeting at the Willow Lake Nature Center, Woodbine. The Spring Regionals meetings are a great way to network with your colleagues and partners in soil and water conservation.

Each meeting will begin with a welcome and overview of our association, followed by a discussion of issues and concerns. We will also be joined by our partners from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

The first meeting in Woodbine will be followed by the Region 8 meeting hosted by Page SWCD at 4:00 PM in Clarinda. On Wednesday, February 26, Lucas SWCD will host the Region 9 regional meeting in the morning in Chariton and at 10:00 AM, and Polk SWCD will host the Region 6 meeting at 4:00 PM in Ankeny.

The Region 7 meeting will be held in Oakville on Thursday, February 27 at 10:00 AM hosted by Louisa SWCD.

The following week will kick off with the Region 1 meeting hosted by Cherokee SWCD in Cleghorn. On Wednesday, March 5, Hamilton SWCD will host the Region 2 meeting in Webster City at 10:00 AM, followed by Hardin SWCD hosting the Region 3 meeting at 4:00 PM in Hampton.

We wrap up the Spring Regionals with the final meeting in Region 4, hosted by Allamakee SWCD at 10:00 AM in Waukon. We look forward to visiting with you at your regional meeting.

CDI Spring Regionals 2025			
Region	SWCD Host Location	Proposed Date & Time*	Location
1	Cherokee	3/4/2025 (10:00 AM)	Cleghorn Community Center, 102 W. Grace St., Cleghorn
2	Hamilton	3/5/2025 (10:00 AM)	Briggs Woods Conf. Ctr., 2501 Briggs Woods Tr., Webster City
3	Hardin	3/5/2025 (4:00 PM)	Maynes Grove, 946 US Hwy. 65, Hampton
4	Allamakee	3/6/2025 (10:00 AM)	Old Rossville Store, 851 Volney Rd., Waukon
5	Harrison	2/25/2025 (10:00 AM)	Willow Lake Nature Ctr., 2725 Easton Tr., Woodbine
6	Polk	2/26/2025 (4:00 PM)	Kirkendall Public Library, 1250 SW District Dr., Ankeny
7	Louisa	2/27/2025 (10:00 AM)	Oakville Community Ctr., 103 Ash St., Oakville, IA
8	Page	2/25/2025 (4:00 PM)	St. Paul Lutheran Church, 2463 IA-2, Clarinda, IA
9	Lucas	2/26/2025 (10:00 AM)	Pin Oak Lodge, 45996 Hwy. 14, Chariton

Iowa recognized for commitment to conservation at NACD meeting



The National Association of Conservation Districts held its 79th Annual Meeting Feb. 8-12 in Salt Lake City, Utah, bringing together conservation leaders from all around the United States. Conservation Districts of Iowa was represented at the meeting by CDI President Jeri Thornsberry and Vice President Eric Wessels, who attended various program events throughout the meeting. CDI Executive Director Dien Judge also attended, and he participated in a meeting of the Association of Conservation Executive Directors.

During the meeting, Iowa was recognized as one of the top ten contributing states to NACD. Iowa ranks seventh in total dollars contributed to NACD. Thornsberry accepted a recognition award from NACD President Kim LaFleur.

NACD also announced winners of the 2024 Poster Contest, and Iowa had a winning entry. The poster made by Chen Gao of East Pottawattamie Soil and Water Conservation District was the first place winner in the Grades 4-6 category. Congratulations to Chen Gao on this national award!

Iowa was honored among the Top Ten Contributing States to NACD at the NACD Annual Conference in Salt Lake City on Feb. 10. Iowa was the seventh highest contributing state in total dollars to NACD this year. This shows the strong commitment to soil and water conservation in our state. Pictured above is Conservation Districts of Iowa President Jeri Thornsberry, left, receiving the recognition award from NACD President Kim LaFleur. Pictured at right, the First Place award winner in the Poster Contest by Chen Gao of East Pottawattamie SWCD.



Pictured at right, Conservation Districts of Iowa President Jeri Thornsberry, center, represented Iowa in the resolutions hearings at the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting on Feb. 11. These hearings involve state conservation association representatives from all around the United States discussing and voting on policy proposals at the federal level.



Conservation Partnership Day is March 11

Soil & Water Commissioners, Partners to gather at the Iowa Capitol



Conservation Districts of Iowa is once again organizing Conservation Partnership Day, which will be held on Tuesday, March 11 at the Iowa Capitol. All SWCD Commissioners are invited to attend and meet with legislators.

The day will begin with a gathering at the Wallace Building to visit with CDI's lobbyist Jim Obradovich, and representatives from our partner organizations. Then commissioners and partners will gather in the rotunda of the Capitol to meet with Iowa legislators in person during the 2025 Iowa Legislative Session.

It's important to have a large group of commissioners in attendance, so please plan to attend!

2025 Envirothon registration deadline is February 28

Winning team at state event goes on to compete in Calgary

Teams of young conservationists will compete this spring in the 2025 Envirothon competition, organized by Conservation Districts of Iowa. Teams must be registered by February 28 to participate in the event. Virtual regional testing will be held between March 17 and March 28.

The state Envirothon competition will be held on Monday, April 28, 2025 at Jester Park Nature Center in Granger, IA.

Resources for 2025 Envirothon competition:

- [2025 Iowa Envirothon Rules and Regulations](#)
- [2025 Iowa Envirothon Study Guide](#)
- [Sample tests](#) and [answer keys!](#)

Please register your 2025 Envirothon team [HERE!](#)

The National Conservation Foundation (NCF) Envirothon is an environmental and natural resource conservation problem-solving, team-building, and leadership experience and competition for 9th – 12th grade students across the U.S.

Iowa Envirothon challenges students statewide to hone critical thinking skills and create inventive solutions to the complex local environmental and natural resource issues facing Iowans today.

Through regional testing and the state competition, teams of Iowa high school students earn a chance to deep dive into valuable environmental and natural resource problem-solving, team-building, and leadership experiences. In Iowa, the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) manage this competition. Starting in 2024, the [Iowa Conservation Education Coalition](#) (ICEC) is partnering with CDI to promote this program!

In Iowa, teams of students sign up for a regional, on-line exams. The teams with the top 15 scores at the regional level are invited to the state competition at a central Iowa location in the spring.



With support from



Resolutions due Friday, March 28

The 2025 Call for Resolutions has been sent out to all Conservation Districts of Iowa offices. This process provides every member of Conservation Districts of Iowa the opportunity to make your voice heard by bringing issues and concerns to the attention of state and federal decision-makers.

Throughout the 2025 Resolutions Process, all resolutions will be properly reviewed by the broader conservation community before being submitted for action.

This year, the deadline for submitting resolutions is Friday, March 28, 2025. Resolutions submitted after this deadline will not be considered for the 2025 cycle. In prior years, some resolutions submitted could have been handled with conversations and/or negotiations with one of our partner agencies. CDI encourages districts to work with the appropriate agency first. If the district is not satisfied with the outcome of those discussions or negotiations, then submit the resolution for consideration.

If multiple districts submit similar resolutions, CDI may combine them into one unified resolution. This strategy will strengthen the position of the districts and provide a clearer, more cohesive argument when presenting the resolution. We once again offer pre-conference resolution voting by mail for commissioners. The goal is to have all 500 commissioners from Iowa's 100 districts to participate in the voting process. Last year, there were close to 400 pre-conference pre-conference ballots cast – this year, CDI hopes to surpass that number.

CDI Scholarship applications to be sent to Regional level

Conservation Districts of Iowa scholarship applicants have submitted their applications to local SWCDs, and now each local SWCD is forwarding their top application to their regional director by March 14.

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.



CDI Poster Contest announced

Rules for the CDI 2025 Poster Contest have been released, and are available at this [link](#). The annual NACD and NACD Auxiliary Poster Contest provides students from kindergarten through 12th grade the chance to have their art displayed as part of a national conservation outreach initiative. Each year, the winning posters highlight the work of conservation districts and their state conservation associations, auxiliaries and agencies to protect and enhance natural resources. The contest starts at the district level; winners advance to the state level, and then to the national level, where they receive recognition at NACD's annual meeting. The poster contest is open to public, private and home-schooled students. The top three posters in each category of the national contest will receive monetary prizes. First-place winners will receive \$200; second place winners will receive \$150 and third place winners will receive \$100. For all those who entered, local sponsors may offer each a special Participation Certificate to recognize their participation. The NACD Auxiliary – through their quilt project proceeds, the Country Store at the NACD Annual Meeting and individual donors – sponsor prizes at the national level.

Incentives available for landowners in Climate-Smart Commodities Horizon II program

Through an \$80 million USDA Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities grant awarded to a partnership of 13 public and private entities led by Roeslein Alternative Energy, Horizon II will provide owners of highly erodible land significant income to participate in the project.

See the full project:

<https://prairieprophets.com/usda-climate-smart-commodities-grant/>