

# ---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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## CDI President's Report

By President Jeri Thornsberry

### Envirothon Recap & Exciting News from CDI

On April 28, the annual state Envirothon competition took place at the Jester Park Nature Center in Granger, just outside Des Moines. This year, 13 five-member teams competed for the top spot. Leading up to the event, the planning team faced several challenges, including severe weather alerts from across Iowa, as teams and their advisors traveled to the venue. Contingency plans were put in place for all scenarios—from sheltering the competitions indoors if rain poured down to ensuring safety measures for a tornado warning. Fortunately, the weather gods were on our side, and none of those plans had to be executed. The skies held out, and the event proceeded without a hitch.

In the end, it was the *Load of Carp* team from Decorah that claimed first place! They will now represent Iowa at the international competition in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, held July 20-26 at Mount Royal University. I asked all the team members if they had their passports—and the answer was an enthusiastic “Yes!” For a full recap of the day’s events, see page 4.

### Soil & Water Conservation Week

This week, we’re also celebrating Iowa’s Soil and Water Conservation Week, running from April 27 to May 4. This year’s theme is “*Home is Where the Habitat Is.*” Be on the lookout for local activities celebrating conservation efforts across the state.

### NRCS Celebrates 90 Years

A big shout-out to our key partner, the NRCS, which celebrated its 90th anniversary on April 27. Their science-based conservation practices have played an essential role in preserving Iowa’s most valuable resources—our soil and water. Congratulations to all NRCS employees across the state for their dedication to conservation and their support --

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--Continued from Page 1 --of all SWCDs.

### CDI's Active Role in Education

It's been an incredibly busy period for CDI as we continue to support the education of Iowa's youth through programs like the Envirothon, the annual poster contest, and the CDI Scholarship Fund. These scholarships wouldn't be possible without the generous contributions of our district partners. Districts contribute either through direct monetary donations or by providing items for the silent auction at annual conference.

Speaking of which, the annual conference is right around the corner—August will be here before we know it! The planning team is already hard at work developing an engaging and informative event. How will your SWCD participate this year? Will you donate to the silent auction or make a monetary contribution? Every dollar helps CDI support Iowa students and the vital conservation work we do.

### Announcing the 2025 CDI Scholarship Recipients

I'm pleased to announce this year's 2025 CDI Scholarship recipients. In an exciting twist, we have a *tie* for third place!

#### 2025 CDI STATE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

| PLACEMENT | REGION | DISTRICT | NAME             | AWARD      |
|-----------|--------|----------|------------------|------------|
| 1         | 9      | Henry    | Halaina Crane    | \$3,000.00 |
| 2         | 8      | Fremont  | Sage McLaren     | \$2,000.00 |
| 3         | 6      | Boone    | Garret McBeth    | \$1,000.00 |
| 3         | 7      | Clinton  | Parker Messerich | \$1,000.00 |

#### 2025 REGIONAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

| REGION | DISTRICT | NAME            | AWARD    |
|--------|----------|-----------------|----------|
| 1      | Woodbury | Colton Warren   | \$500.00 |
| 2      | Humboldt | Elliott Carlson | \$500.00 |
| 3      | Grundy   | Danielle Wagner | \$500.00 |
| 4      | Jackson  | Maranda Wood    | \$500.00 |
| 5      | Cass     | Lola Comes      | \$500.00 |

### Upcoming Events

#### Poster Contest:

Entries were due by April 25 at local SWCD offices. On June 20, the winning posters from each district will be submitted electronically to CDI Regional Directors. Be sure to check out the CDI website at [cdiowa.org](http://cdiowa.org) for full details. On July 19, CDI Regional Directors will choose the top winners from each of Iowa's 9 regions across 5 categories to represent Iowa at the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) National Poster Contest. The winner will be announced at the 2026 NACD Annual Conference.

While I was at the 2025 NACD Annual Conference in Salt Lake City, I learned that Chen Gao, a student from East Pott SWCD, who won in the 4th-6th grade category! Her winning poster will be displayed at the annual conference—what an incredible achievement for her and for Iowa. Congratulations, Chen!

#### Resolutions:

The 2025 CDI Pre-Conference Resolutions Voting Materials have been sent to all CAs. SWCD ballots must be submitted to the CDI office by 4 p.m. on Tuesday, July 1.

#### Annual Conference:

Mark your calendars! The 79th Annual Conference will take place on Monday and Tuesday, August 25-26, at the Gateway Hotel and Conference Center in Ames. Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner

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-Continued from Page 2 – registration, meals, and hotel accommodations are covered by IDALS. Mileage is reimbursable through your district's Commissioner Expense Funding (1M). Please consider registering this year—your voice is crucial, and it's important that we all come together to continue our collective conservation efforts.

Please stay safe and take care!

# Iowa celebrates stewardship during Soil & Water Conservation Week

Every year, SWCDs across the country celebrate Stewardship Week as a way to promote natural resource conservation. This year, Soil and Water Conservation Week began April 27<sup>th</sup> and runs through May 4<sup>th</sup>. The theme for this year is “Home Is Where The Habitat Is”.



Please celebrate the week by hosting an outreach activity to promote the outstanding work your district is involved with. As we have done in previous years, we ask that the districts share what activities you are doing that week, so please share your pics, activities and ideas with the central office staff and CDI staff! If you have pictures, please also send the photos to [Media@iowaagriculture.gov](mailto:Media@iowaagriculture.gov) and we will add the photos to our Facebook photo album. **Don't forget to include captions for your pictures.**

Attached you will find some ideas to help you celebrate the week as well as some talking points to help you promote things you are doing in your district. Feel free to also print the attached flyer and display it in your office or throughout your community. We have also included logos you can insert on the signature line of your emails or incorporate onto any articles or press releases.

We would like to see all districts get involved this year! Let's be creative again this year to keep promoting the great work Soil and Water Conservation Districts do every day! Thanks for your participation!

## CDI Executive Director's Report

By Dien Judge

Iowa Soil & Water Conservation Week kicked off with a successful and fun Envirothon 2025 state competition. It takes a lot of hours of work to put together this event, when the top 15 teams from all around the state of Iowa compete and test their skills on conservation issues. These high schoolers are always impressive with their knowledge and preparation. This year's event was threatened by some potential weather conditions, but organizers had a plan in place for inclement weather. Fortunately, it stayed dry throughout the entire event and everything proceeded without a hitch.

All of this is thanks to the many, many volunteers who helped bring this event together. I cannot express my gratitude enough to everyone involved. THANK YOU to all volunteers who made Envirothon 2025 a success. – Continued on Page 4

--Continued from Page 3 --Now that the Envirothon state competition is in the books, the winning team, Decorah Load of Carp, will be represent Iowa at the International Competition. We know they will represent us well.

One more note about Envirothon: CDI covers the financial costs of this event, and we could not do that without our generous sponsors. This year's Iowa Envirothon has been sponsored by generous support from the Walton Family Foundation, USDA-NRCS, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, and Smithfield. We thank them for their dedication to the youth of Iowa.

In other news, CDI has been informed by USDA-NRCS that the funding for our three cooperative agreements has been fully released. You may remember that federal reimbursements for three of our programs were "paused" earlier this year and we were forced to lay off staff. Now that the funding has been released, we have asked our staff members to return to their jobs and get back to the business of conservation. We are pleased to report that most of the staff members have chosen to return to their positions.

Have a great Soil & Water Conservation Week, and please help spread the word about the important work that we do to protect our precious soil and water resources.

## Decorah Load of Carp team wins top spot in Envirothon 2025

The Iowa Envirothon competition is an annual environmental and natural resources competition for high school students. The 2025 Iowa Envirothon state competition was held on April 28 at the Jester Park Nature Center and Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center. The Iowa Envirothon program is sponsored by the Conservation Districts of Iowa, with support from natural resource and education professionals with Iowa Conservation Education Coalition, Iowa Natural Resource Conservation Service, Iowa Department of Agriculture, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Soil and Water Conservation District staff and commissioners, and retired Agricultural Education teachers.

As an annual international competition sponsored by the National Conservation Foundation, more than 25,000 high school -- Continued on Page 5 --



First place overall team at Envirothon 2025 was Decorah Load of Carp. L-R Hannah Arendt, Amelia Wadsworth, Lily Sandhorst, Mason Myers, Margret Zook.

-- **Continued from Page 4** -- students across the United States, Canada, China, and Singapore embark on a journey to find creative solutions to critical questions through Envirothon.

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. Both the regional and state contest include questions in these four areas: wildlife, soils, aquatics, and forestry/prairie.

During the 2025 Iowa Envirothon state contest, these 15 teams of five members each qualified for competition, from (alpha order) Algona High School, Bishop Garrigan, Decorah High school (2 teams), Eddyville-Blakesburg-Fremont Jr/Sr High, Forest City High School, Marshalltown (2 teams), Muscatine High School (2 teams), Nashua-Plainfield, North Fayette Valley Community School District, Northeast Community School District, South Tama County High School, and Unity Christian High School.

Emphasizing hands-on learning and real-world application of concepts, Envirothon students are involved in hands-on activities using environmental science and conservation equipment and skills used by environmental and natural resource conservation professionals. Each team will travel through stations: soils and land use, aquatic ecology, forestry and prairie, and wildlife. Plus, each team will develop and present an oral presentation on the 2025 current issue topic, "Roots and Resiliency: Fostering Forest Stewardship in a Canopy of Change."

### **2025 Iowa Envirothon State Competition Results –**

1. Decorah Load of Carp
2. Marshalltown Wolf Trees
3. Decorah Duff & Duffer
4. North Fayette-Valley EcoThrive

### **2025 Iowa FFA Top Two Teams –**

1. Nashau-Plainfield FFA
2. Forest City Gold FFA
- 3.



With support from







Second Place Overall team at Envirothon 2025 was the Marshalltown Wolf Trees team. L-R Isaac Young, Anna Smigowski, Ella Spitzli, Anna Phomvisay, Landon Stanley.



Third Place Overall team at Envirothon 2025 was the Decorah Duff & Duffer team. L-R Riley Berns, Reid Berns, Carson Bohner, Reid Kuehner, Grant Zilka



First Place FFA team at Envirothon 2025 was Nashua-Plainfield FFA. L-R Nic Brase, Easton Richards, Grace Dietz, Braeden Mitchell, Marleigh Lowe.



Second Place FFA team at Envirothon 2025 was the Forest City Gold team. L-R Advisor Ryan Faught, Teagan Langerud, Aubrey Olson, Olivia Eastvold, Max Aitchison, Riley Smith.

Special thanks to our Envirothon 2025 sponsors and supporters:

**Walton Family Foundation**  
**USDA-NRCS**  
**Iowa Farm Bureau Federation**  
**Smithfield**