

---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 EXECUTIVE BOARD:

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CDI OFFICE STAFF:

Executive Director: Dien Judge
Program Assistant: Regan Davis

Office Phone: 515-289-8300
Office Address:
Conservation Districts of Iowa
2015 Grand Ave. (Box #15)
Des Moines, IA. 50312
Website: <https://cdiowa.org>

CDI President's Report

By President Jeri Thornsberry

CDI staff and officers are hard at work planning our **79th Annual Conference**, and we're excited to invite every one of our 500 elected commissioners and all appointed assistant commissioners to attend this vital event. It's more than just a meeting—it's a chance to have your voice heard, connect with peers, and shape the future of conservation in Iowa.

We understand how busy everyone is, but we can't stress this enough: your participation truly matters. We're fortunate to get about 90 of you each year—but imagine the energy and progress we could make with twice that number—or even more.

Why You Should Join Us

Dates: Monday–Tuesday, August 25–26, 2025

Location: Gateway Hotel and Conference Center in Ames

Cost to you: \$0

This **all-expense-paid** two-day conference is made possible thanks to support from IDALS. Your registration, hotel, and meals are covered. Mileage is reimbursable through your district's Commissioner Expense Fund (1M).

What Makes This Conference So Important

Day 1 (Monday, August 25):

We'll handle the official business of the association—voting on key resolutions, amending bylaws, approving the budget, and electing officers. The direction you help set here guides our work statewide.

We'll also host learning sessions to dive into today's most pressing conservation issues and emerging opportunities. This is your chance to bring questions and ideas to the table.

Day 2 (Tuesday, August 26):

We'll engage directly with our major partners: IDALS, NRCS, DNR, and FSA. These open-dialogue sessions offer a unique opportunity to get clarity on decisions that impact your work and future farm operations.

Why Your Attendance Matters

You were elected to represent your fellow citizens in your county. This conference is your annual opportunity to represent them on the statewide stage. The decisions made at this event influence conservation policies, funding, and initiatives across Iowa.

--Continued on Page 2

-Continued from Page 2

Your voice matters. Your presence strengthens CDI's work and ensures that we move forward together, not in silos.

We hope you'll register as soon as conference details are released and join fellow commissioners in making this the most impactful conference yet. Together, we're stronger—and your participation is the key.

Upcoming Deadlines

Poster Contest

- June 27: Winning posters from each SWCD must be submitted electronically to your CDI Regional Directors.
- July 19: Regional Directors select top posters in each category to represent Iowa at the 2026 NACD Annual Conference. Full details at [cdiowa.org](https://www.cdiowa.org).

Pre-Conference Resolutions Ballot

- July 1 at 4:00 PM: Ballots must be received at the CDI office. Full details at [cdiowa.org](https://www.cdiowa.org)

As I write this on Memorial Day, I'm reflecting on those who gave their lives in service to our country. Their sacrifice reminds me why our work matters—protecting the land, communities, and freedoms they fought for. I hope you also had a meaningful Memorial Day.

Looking forward to seeing you in August!

CDI Executive Director's Report

By Executive Director Dien Judge

As the weather changes from springtime to summer--and we all spend more time outdoors--it's a great time to pause and look around the landscape to see the many successful conservation practices around our state. We may see the corn sprouting up in a no-till field, or we may see the grassed waterways and the terraces and drainage systems all working together to conserve our precious soil and improve our water quality.

I would encourage you to keep these practices in mind as you drive through your local area, and to use these examples to help spread the word to local landowners about the success of these conservation practices.

Our efforts in conservation are important and impactful, as we know we are working to ensure that future generations can benefit from fertile soils and clean water resources. We know that these practices add value to our land...it pays to implement soil conservation.

Summer is also a time to start thinking about the CDI Annual Conference. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend the conference this year. This is our best opportunity all year to share and learn from our commissioners and partners from all around the state of Iowa.

Lastly, now that the CDI grant funding has been restored, we have been busy conducting interviews and filling positions that were because of the layoffs in February. We still have several job openings, so if you know someone who is looking to start a career in conservation, please send them to our website:

<https://www.cdiowa.org/who-we-are/job-openings/>

As Iowa Legislative Session concludes, state conservation funding steady

REAP Program extended into 2028

The Iowa Legislature was adjourned on May 15 in the early hours of the morning, after passing a budget of \$9.452 billion for fiscal year 2026.

The budget had been delayed following a push to limit the use of eminent domain for carbon capture pipelines.

Funding for conservation programs remains steady, with strong support from the Agriculture and Natural Resources Appropriations bill, and the Infrastructure Appropriations bill, which were both approved by the Iowa House and Senate.

Appropriations of interest in these bills include: **\$1 million** for the CREP Program; **\$900,000** for Watershed Protection; **\$900,000** for the Conservation Reserve Program; **\$8.2 million** for Soil and Water Conservation (from Enviro First); **\$3.8 million** for Soil and Water Conservation Administration; **\$2.375** for the Water Quality Initiative (from Enviro First); **\$12 million** for REAP; **\$525,000** for Forest Health Management; **\$150,000** for Iowa State University Extension private lands forester; **\$200,000** for IGS Groundwater Assessment; **\$8.2 million** for the Water Quality Initiative (from RIIIF); **\$9.6 million** for the Lake Restoration program.

The REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection) program has been extended for three years, as a result of the passage of this legislation as well, which will ensure funding for REAP until June 30, 2028.

Conservation Districts of Iowa represents you, and supports your priorities, at the Iowa Capitol. During the annual legislative session, CDI employs the services of Jim Obradovich and his team at the Capitol Group firm to promote our official Conservation Districts of Iowa Resolutions and monitor any legislation that would be detrimental to our mission in soil and water conservation.



The west side of the Iowa State Capitol the morning of the final day of the 2025 Legislative Session. (Photo by the Capitol Group).

Save the date:

**Conservation Districts of Iowa Annual Conference
August 25-26**

Gateway Hotel & Conference Center, Ames

Conference registration details to be released soon

CDI staff are back on the job after federal funding ‘pause’

Many CDI staff members have returned to their positions following the unfortunate layoffs that were caused in February by the Trump Administration’s “pause” in federal payments for grant programs. The pause in payments has ended, and all staff members were offered the opportunity to work for CDI once again.

Grant funded program staff began returning to work over the course of the last three months. This includes CDI program staff in the Conservation Planning Program, the Private Lands Conservation Partnership Program, and the CDI Administrative Support Program.

CDI Executive Director Dien Judge said the first goal was to bring back any staff members who wanted to return to work for CDI, and then to fill any open positions as soon as possible.

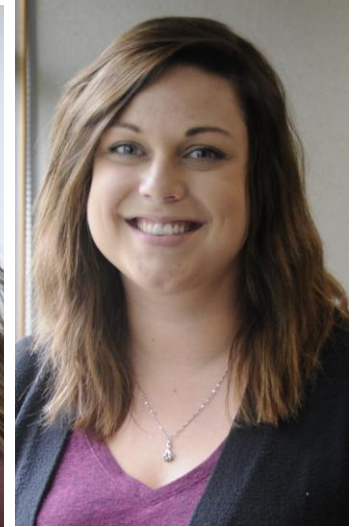
“Our dedicated, experienced staff members are vitally important to this organization, and they work

hard every day to fulfill our mission and enact our programs,” said Judge.

There have been a few changes in staffing as employees were brought back to work. Carlee Sabus has moved to the Conservation Planning

Coordinator position, joining Madison Conley in the program to assist districts in updating and maintaining five-year conservation plans. Carlee and Madison bring a wealth of experience to the table, and will be contacting districts about the conservation planning process in the months to come.

Regan Davis has taken the newly-created position of CDI Program Assistant. Davis will be working out of the CDI office in Des Moines, and will be working in the Private Lands Conservation Partnership program, as well as with projects and events, such as CDI’s Annual Conference, Envirothon, Conservation Partnership Day and—**Continued on Page 5**



Carlee Sabus, right, has joined the CDI Conservation Planning Program as a Conservation Planning Coordinator. She joins Madison Conley, left, in the program that will continue to assist Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners with the updating of their 5-year conservation plans.



Regan Davis has returned to CDI, and now serves as CDI Program Assistant. She will be working on various programs and projects throughout the year

Continued from Page 4 -- the CDI Poster Contest.

“As I head into this new position, I am grateful and excited to be back at Conservation Districts of Iowa,” said Davis. “CDI offers education and technical support to communities throughout the state to help empower individuals to make a change in their local environment. I believe community conservation, no matter how big or small, is the foundation for the future of protecting Iowa’s soil and water resources. I look forward to working with CDI program employees, IDALS and NRCS staff and partners to help fulfill the goals of Conservation Districts of Iowa.”

Program staff in the CDI Administrative Support Program and the Private Lands Conservation Partnership have also returned to their positions and are back to work in various offices all around the state of Iowa.

There are several job opportunities with CDI, and we welcome applications for eager individuals looking to start a career in conservation. Job openings can be found at this link:

<https://www.cdiowa.org/who-we-are/job-openings/>.



Poster Contest entries evaluated

Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company makes it possible for CDI to partner with the National Association of Conservation Districts to offer the 2025 Conservation Poster Contest. Local

entries for the contest were due April to their local Soil & Water Conservation Districts, and are being evaluated at the local level.

Before June 27, 2025, local SWCDs will choose one district winner from each of the five grade categories and electronically submit the entries to their CDI Regional Director via email with a photo of each winning poster and their poster contest entry form. 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.

For complete rules and information, please go to this link: <https://www.cdiowa.org/get-involved/poster-contest/>.

Pre-conference voting underway for CDI Resolutions

Local Soil & Water District Commissioners are currently reviewing the list of proposed CDI resolutions, and voting in the pre-conference voting process. CDI member districts have until Tuesday, July 1 to submit their pre-conference ballots to CDI. Ballots should be emailed to admin@cdiowa.org.

CDI Scholarship spotlight:

First Place Scholarship

Winner Halaina Crane



Halaina Crane, of Mt. Pleasant, is the winner of the 2025 First Place Scholarship from Conservation Districts of Iowa. She is planning to attend the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point.

Halaina Crane, from CDI Region 9, is the winner of CDI's First Place Scholarship award, and will receive \$3,000 toward her college education. Halaina is planning to attend the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point.

"My name is Halaina Crane, and I have lived in Mt. Pleasant my whole life. I spend much of my time playing guitar, listening to music, gardening, caring for my three dogs and cat, and simply spending time outdoors," she said.

"Since I was young, I have always felt a deep passion for nature, whether that be listening to bird calls with my grandfather, catching fish, frogs, and bugs, or looking for morels whenever the season would hit.

"Growing up, I was always fascinated by the nature programs they would show on television, but I came to realize that they only ever talked about places far from home; What was going on in the Midwest? This question prompted me to begin deep research into North American ecosystems, and with the help of those around me and the experiences I gained, I have come to realize that it is my calling to conserve our native

lands. I am beyond grateful for this scholarship and will be attending the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point to major in Forestry with an emphasis on Ecosystem Restoration and Management so that I gain the skills and knowledge to help protect our natural world."

The Second Place award of \$2,000 will go to Sage McLaren of Fremont County. The Third Place award resulted in a tie, so two third place awards of \$1,000 will be given to Garret McBeth of Boone County and Parker Messerich of Clinton County.

Awards of \$500 will be given to Colton Warren of Woodbury County, Elliott Carlson of Humboldt County, Danielle Wagner of Grundy County, Maranda Wood of Jackson County and Lola Comes of Cass County. Scholarship awards are sent directly to the college or university in August.