

---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



October 2025
Volume 7, Number 10

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CDI President's Report

By President Sean Dolan

As October draws to a close, harvest is also wrapping up. My family finished on Monday, but there is plenty of work to do. We still have cover crops to seed and the ground temperatures are getting cool enough that we feel comfortable to start injecting manure from our hog barns. We are also planning ahead for the 2026 growing season.

I wish our elected leaders did a better job of planning ahead. The nation is in the fourth week of a government shutdown, and from a conservation standpoint, it could not have come at a worse time.

As you know, in Iowa we have a short window between harvest and freeze up to get critical conservation practices implemented in fields. Most of these projects are currently at a standstill.

In my home county (Buchanan), we have one \$452,000 project with the excavator sitting idle in the field, waiting for a final engineering plan before work begins. I am sure you have similar stories in your county and we would like hear from you about them.

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) has put out a call asking all of us to share what we are seeing on the ground so that they can relay these concerns. I also urge you to contact your Senators and Representatives and relay your concerns.

CDI of Iowa is also planning ahead, we are looking for ways to get more commissioners in attendance at the annual conference.

Ideas include shortening the conference to one day, timing of conference, and mixing up the speaker topics. It is a worthwhile conference, and I am always struck by the passion and energy everyone brings to help improve the soil, water, and, in turn, quality of life for all Iowans. If you have ideas or thoughts on the conference, please reach out to us.

CDI Executive Director's Report

By Executive Director Dien Judge

In the September edition of *Connections*, I wrote in this space that we were preparing for an expected government shutdown. Here we are at the end of October, and the federal government has been under a lapse of appropriations for a full month. This is a failure of leadership, and we need to ask our elected officials to do better. In our system of government, we expect our representatives to negotiate and come to a bipartisan compromise to resolve differences. That's how our republic is supposed to work.

We hope this situation is resolved soon, so we can better fulfill our mission of informing, educating and leading Iowans through our local soil and water conservation districts to promote conservation of natural resources. We do our work through a strong partnership with USDA-NRCS and IDALS, but it is very challenging when one of the partners is shut down.

Our national partner organization, the National Association of Conservation Districts, encourages you to contact your Congressional representatives and share examples of the shutdown's impacts on landowners and operators, producers, and your communities. Please reach out to your elected officials and urge them to put partisanship aside and work together to negotiate a bipartisan compromise to end this federal shutdown.

We are very thankful to be associated with such a strong organization as NACD, which has been very helpful during this time with their regular updates on federal issues. NACD would also like to hear from you. Help them understand how conservation districts are affected by the shutdown through the [NACD impacts survey](#). This survey will be very helpful to make the case to our elected officials.

The CDI office remains open and will continue to provide assistance to member districts throughout the shutdown. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at any time if you have questions or concerns. My email address is dien@cdiowa.org.

Do you have a great conservation success story to share? Send us your conservation stories and we'll share them in the Connections newsletter.

Contact your federal representatives

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Dry Run Creek: Two Decades of Community and Conservation

Nestled in the southwest corner of Black Hawk County lies a 15,000-acre watershed known as **Dry Run Creek** — or **DRC**, for short. Its many branches begin in rural farmland before flowing through a mix of industrial, commercial, and residential areas in Cedar Falls. This diversity of landscape reflects the character of the community itself — a blend of people with unique backgrounds, perspectives, and priorities. Yet, much like the creek's converging streams, the citizens of Cedar Falls are united by shared connections, whether through local pride in the Panthers and Tigers or through a collective response to challenges that affect everyone — including environmental ones.

In the late 1990s, a series of reported fish kills prompted a DNR investigation, revealing that Dry Run Creek was no longer supporting a healthy and diverse aquatic ecosystem. As a result, the creek was added to Iowa's 303(d) list of impaired water bodies, marking it as a priority for restoration. This designation galvanized the Black Hawk Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to rally partners and resources for targeted improvement.

By early 2005, a coalition had formed — bringing together city officials, university experts from the University of Northern Iowa, and technical assistance from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and the local NRCS office. Together, they secured an initial development grant, officially launching the Dry Run Creek Watershed Improvement Project.

Finding the Source of the Problem

Understanding the causes of impairment required significant investigation. Through research, monitoring, and local insight, the team identified two key issues: urban stormwater — **Continued on Page 4**



Partners with the Dry Run Creek Watershed Advisory Board, Black Hawk Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, and Iowa Department of Natural Resources.



Stormwater wetland improvements near the University of Northern Iowa have led to cleaner water and reduced soil erosion

Continued from Page 3 -- runoff, which carried pollutants limiting aquatic life, and sedimentation from rural soil erosion, which degraded habitat for fish and macroinvertebrates.

These findings made one thing clear — improving the watershed would require participation from every corner of the community, both urban and rural.

Engaging the Community

Public involvement became a cornerstone of the project. The team worked creatively to raise awareness and offer hands-on opportunities for citizens to take part. Efforts included: organizing water sampling programs through IOWATER and the Izaak Walton League's *Save Our Streams* initiative, hosting rain barrel workshops and field days on local farms, demonstrating conservation practices that neighbors could replicate, and Sharing information through presentations, booths, classrooms, and community events.

Digital outreach played a role as well, with social media, videos, newsletters, interactive maps, and local press coverage helping to spread the message. In fact, some say Dry Run Creek might be “the most signed watershed in the world,” thanks to its many educational signs along roads and trails — a visible testament to community engagement and stewardship.

Two Decades of Progress

Over the past twenty years, the Dry Run Creek project has fostered a culture of conservation across the Cedar Valley. More than 300 best management practices have been implemented throughout the watershed, supported by \$3.1 million in combined local, state, and federal funding.

These efforts have resulted in: 124 million gallons of stormwater infiltrated naturally each year, 3,700 tons of soil prevented from eroding annually, and a measurable increase in aquatic diversity and abundance.

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Looking Ahead

While the numbers are impressive, they tell only part of the story. Behind every conservation practice and restored stream segment are the people — the landowners, volunteers, coordinators, students, and community leaders who made this work possible. The project's success has been shaped by four watershed coordinators (Rebecca Kauten, Phillip Schuppert, Ashley Kittle, and Josh Balk), numerous interns, SWCD and NRCS staff, commissioners, partners, funders, and the many residents who took conservation to heart.



Attendees participating in a "Build Your Own Rain Barrel" workshop

"We all live in a watershed and all have a role to play," says Josh Balk, Watershed and Source Water Protection Coordinator with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "The citizens of the Cedar Valley have prioritized conservation and their community to help improve local water quality here."

As Dry Run Creek flows forward into its next chapter, so too does the shared commitment of those who call this watershed home — continuing the work to clean the water, protect the soil, and sustain the community for generations to come. Here's to the years ahead!



Volunteers with the Green Iowa AmeriCorps program volunteers to help construct a residential rain garden to help manage and treat stormwater runoff.

Plans for Envirothon 2026 underway

Conservation Districts of Iowa is preparing once again for the Iowa Envirothon competition for Iowa youth. Next year's competition will be held in the spring of 2026, and will be open to high school youth from all around the state of Iowa.

Envirothon is an environmental and natural resources conservation problem-solving, leadership and academic competition for kids grades 9-12 or ages 14-19 across the United States, Canada, China and Singapore. The program incorporates STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) principles, hands-on learning and outdoor field experiences. Envirothon is a program of the National Conservation Foundation, and is operated in Iowa by CDI in partnership with the Iowa Conservation Education Coalition.

The registration link for the 2026 competition is now live on the CDI website, www.cdiowa.org and teams can register before the deadline of Feb. 26, 2026.

We hope you'll reach out to your local school district and encourage them to get involved in Envirothon.



STAR CIP contest has been extended until 11/15

For a limited time, producers using the STAR tool who complete a Conservation Innovation Plan (CIP) will also be entered to win one of five \$50 gift cards. Each field with a completed CIP will be entered (one prize per producer, deadline has been extended to **November 15th**). Participation in STAR allows producers to see progress over time, and the CIP will help producers ensure they are on track in meeting their conservation goals while balancing the economic viability of their operation. STAR is committed to protecting a producer's privacy – data is never shared beyond STAR without the producer's permission.

You can find the tool at startool.ag. Please email Regan Davis, regan@cdiowa.org if you have any questions about the STAR Tool or need assistance in enrolling. Check back to September Connections for more information on the IA STAR Tool and how to get involved!

