

# ---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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### From: CDI President Dennis Carney

Best wishes to everyone in these unusual times. I hope you and yours are staying healthy and doing what you can to help those around you.

In response to the coronavirus / COVID-19 pandemic, all our schedules change frequently. **However, note that CDI is moving forward with several programs.** We were able to hold two of our nine Spring Regionals and are doing what we can to get information from Spring Regionals out to the seven districts that were unable to host meetings. CDI held two of our regional Envirothon competitions before that program was cancelled by NACD for 2020. CDI's scholarship program is in the final judging phase with results being announced soon, and our poster contest is alive and well. We have received nine resolutions from CDI districts.

CDI cancelled the summer Board Tour scheduled for June, but we have yet to make a decision about the annual conference. The S.T.A.R. Program is moving forward with more information to be sent out soon. We realize the challenges you all are experiencing, including holding commissioner meetings. Please continue your important work in natural resources protection, call our office with any questions, and stay healthy.

### NACD President Tim Palmer says work of conservation stewards "coming into clear view" in Washington

In a recent interview with Agri-Pulse reporter Jeff Nalley, NACD President Tim Palmer welcomes new initiatives by farm groups and USDA to reduce farming's environmental impact while increasing productivity. Palmer says program funds should be maintained and staff restored to local conservation offices. Palmer also discusses the definition of "sustainability" – and the limitations of the word – and how cover crops deliver a "win for everyone". **Click to hear the [complete Palmer interview](#).**

## Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

**We all know that life can change in an instant** and that fact has really been pointed out to all of us with the current COVID-19 pandemic. We are working from home, or just staying home and worrying about ourselves and our families. We are also wondering about how we can continue our important work for soil conservation and water quality improvement.

In my life experiences, I have participated in many conference calls and think nothing of joining one, but a couple of years ago, I set up a call for a fraternal committee I serve on and one of the committee members responded that she had never participated in a conference call and was unsure how it would work. As Commissioners who cannot meet face-to-face, you now find yourselves in that conference call or other electronic meeting situation, and you wonder about doing it correctly. By that I don't mean how to join a call but rather how to make sure that you are conducting a legal meeting. **Iowa open meetings law allows you to hold a conference call for an official meeting if you post the conference call information publicly on your agenda.** By doing this, you have notified the public that you are having a meeting and you have provided the public with the information so that they can call into the meeting if they wish to. I would suggest that you ask for guests on your conference calls to identify themselves so that you can record their presence in your minutes.

### Districts Urged to Help Publicize 2020 Soil and Water Conservation Week

This year Iowa celebrates its 79<sup>th</sup> Soil and Water Conservation Week during the week of April 26 – May 3, 2020. The celebration is part of the nationally celebrated Soil and Water Stewardship week. **The theme this year is “Where Would We BEE Without Pollinators?”**. Iowa's conservation districts are urged to help prepare for this year's Soil and Water Conservation Week by reaching out to local media to publicize local and state events. [Click here to review talking points](#) IDALS has prepared that districts may use to submit a letter to the editor; or they may choose to call local radio, newspaper, environmental/commodity publication or news station and schedule a time to talk to them about Soil and Water Conservation.



5-Year Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plan

## CDI Planners – on a mission to help each district advance environmental sustainability

The work of helping each district launch their own new 5-year ‘Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plan’ means a lot of miles on Iowa highways and byways. But early reports from the CDI planners in the field indicate the trips are worth it – and will make a big difference in the future of conservation throughout the state.

Matt Jefferson has been traveling the roads of Northwest Iowa. **“I’ve seen some real enthusiasm from those who attended our public meetings,”** says Jefferson. “Discussion with our working groups has been lively at times. One gentleman called his district office the day after the meeting to thank them, and to say that we should host these more often.”

Jefferson is a member of the CDI team that includes Jonathan Hendricks, Nate Kilburg and Joe Hayes. Each planner takes responsibility for assisting assigned districts through the process – from helping facilitate Local Working Group and public meetings, to assembling resource inventories, to drafting a final report for district and state approval. Once a plan is approved, the planners will remain to help districts monitor progress on meeting the conservation goals they’ve established.

“I’ve had positive feedback from state and federal staff as well,” Jefferson says. **“I’m grateful for the cooperation we have seen from district offices. None of this is possible without them.”**

In Southwest Iowa, planner Jonathan Hendricks is impressed with the ability of the local district boards to rally the community. “Some of our commissioners have served their communities for over 40 years! They can connect with nearly everyone in the area. Through this process I have seen commissioners bring together folks from incredibly diverse backgrounds and skillsets that all care deeply for conservation.”

Hendricks says the encouraging outcome is collective deliberations that empower the rest of the community. **“Long-term planning can be tough. Conservation and change are not cheap, nor do they come quickly.** In today’s agricultural industry, producers recognize that there is a cost, financial and otherwise, to conservation and must weigh these challenges against the slim margins of producing the food and fuel to sustain our country.” Conservation needs a voice. That voice is the district and those that serve it. “I’m happy to report that voice is calling local minds to the deliberation table.”

When life returns to normal and all agree we can congregate again in groups, CDI planners will again resume their travels statewide, bringing together local people who have a chance to contribute their ideas for how their district should move forward in the years ahead to ensure healthy soil and quality water resources.



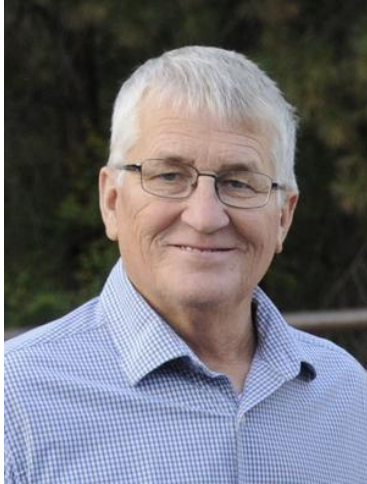
*In Linn County, volunteers gather to participate in soil and water planning as a Local Working Group, helping the district establish measurable goals for the next five years.*

*CDI President Dennis Carney addresses critical concerns in locally published essay*

## Iowa is leaking nutrients better left in its soil

Conservation Districts of Iowa President Dennis Carney recently authored an article published by the Globe Gazette in Mason City, urging immediate action to turn back nitrate loss in Iowa, and halt the debilitating impact that loss has on ag producers' bottom line and the environment.

"We have known for decades that unneeded tillage and the application of crop fertilizers months before they are needed by a crop result in soil and nutrient losses," writes Carney. **"Farm operators, landowners, agricultural groups, and the general public need to get involved now to solve this issue."**



*CDI President Dennis Carney*

According to University of Iowa research engineer Chris Jones, 980 million pounds of nitrate passed from the Mississippi and Missouri rivers in 2019, leaving the state for the Gulf of Mexico. **"This huge amount of lost nitrogen was purchased by Iowa farmers for well over \$300 million,"** Carney writes. "In addition, the nitrogen loss causes dangerous problems for water supplies downstream and contributes to the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico."

In 2013, Iowa implemented its Nutrient Reduction Strategy as the result of a directive from the Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Task Force. Iowa's goal from the beginning was a 45% reduction in the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus entering the state's waterways. The strategy has emphasized voluntary cost-shared practices such as cover crops, nutrient reducing wetlands, and edge-of-field bioreactors to reach its goal.

After six years, in 2018, the amount of Iowa acres with cover crops has grown to nearly 900,000. Unfortunately, to meet the 45% reduction goal Iowa needs 12 million acres of cover crops in the state. Since the introduction of this voluntary strategy the total annual amount of nitrates leaving our state has increased by 46%.

**"Everyone in Iowa has an economic and environmental stake in the quality of our water,"** writes Carney. "With the knowledge that Iowa's nitrate loss has almost doubled in the span of 16 years, it is time to reassess our priorities."

To read Dennis Carney's complete essay published by the Globe Gazette, [click here](#).

## CDI Poster Contest Deadline Update

The 2020 Conservation Poster Contest is still active, and districts should encourage students statewide to participate! Any child that resides in Iowa, is a public, private or home school student in Kindergarten through 12th grade with a participating SWCD can enter.



CDI has rescheduled deadlines to accommodate ongoing COVID-19 concerns. Two critical dates to note:

- **Monday, June 1, 2020:** Applicants must submit their poster accompanied by the Poster Contest Entry Form to the SWCD office in the county which their school is located.
- **Wednesday, July 1, 2020:** The local SWCD chooses one county winner from each of the five grade categories to submit to their CDI Regional Director.

**For the complete update in new deadlines, go to [Poster Contest rules](#).**