

---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

Thank you to all the commissioners who participated in CDI's Legislative Day. We had the rotunda filled with regional displays and partner booths. Many legislators stopped and were able to visit with commissioners from their area about the need for conservation funding. Regrettably, two major events that were just getting underway in March are now impacted because of the concern over coronavirus. Our regional Envirothon events – so popular with young Iowa high school students interested in the environment and conservation – have now been unfortunately canceled.

Additionally, just as we were getting Spring Regionals underway, those important gatherings of districts and our partners have also been canceled. We are currently in discussions to find alternate ways for us to communicate. **Thank you to all the CDI staff and district personnel who put so much effort into planning and preparing these important events** – in most cases, a months-long commitment of time. The good news: Spring is coming!

Iowa Soil and Water Conservation Week set for April 26-May 3

Districts are now in the planning stages for the **2020 Iowa Soil and Water Conservation Week**, set to begin Sunday, April 26th. The eight-day statewide event is an opportunity to recognize the important conservation work spreading across the Iowa landscape, and bring attention to ongoing efforts by farmers, landowners and urban residents to protect the state's soil and water resources.

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

In conservation, we depend on plans – whether it be a conservation plan on an individual farm or an urban conservation plan to address urban runoff or flooding. The expression ‘failing to plan means planning to fail’ comes to mind. This expression can be taken a little bit further and relate it to cover crops or any of the other conservation practices we use today. We know the many benefits of cover crops and we know that we need to greatly expand the number of acres seeded to cover crops in Iowa, but too many producers are skeptical of the practice, and for many reasons.

I believe that financial pressures and fear of failure are the main reasons for not implementing more cover crops, but a long-time friend recently said that he doesn’t believe in cover crops because they are for one year only, not like a terrace which is a permanent conservation structure. He has constructed a lot of terraces on his land, so he is not against conservation. I guess I need to talk about the benefits of cover crops, beyond the one-year timeframe when we are hunting together.

To back up to the main reasons though, I understand financial pressure and it is unfortunate that even though we know that long-term use of cover crops will lower costs of producing crops, most producers are looking at the picture in the one-year timeframe. How will they pay the bills/notes this fall? As for the fear of failure, that is very much like failing to plan: if you start using cover crops believing that they will not work, then they will not work in your operation. It’s all about attitude! **Our job as promoters of good conservation and water quality practices is to sell the benefits of cover crops.** Field days are a great way to do this. Does your district have an annual field day? Do you have a demonstration plot near a major highway in your district? What can you do and how can we help you?

We all know that cover crops are a critically important tool in conservation, water quality and soil health. We also know that the clock is ticking to get these practices implemented.

Iowa district commissioner featured in PBS news program

Hamilton SWCD Commissioner Jean Eels was recently featured in the nationally broadcast “PBS News Hour” weekend program, highlighting her work promoting conservation practices targeting women landowners. Eels told interviewer Mark Bittman of PBS that a turning point for her was discovering “...women own or co-own half the land in Iowa. And yet I didn't see them active as conservationists. I was curious about that. How could that be?”

The March 7th broadcast focused on Eels’ success helping educate landowners through “**The Women, Food and Agriculture Network**”, which she co-founded in 1998. Eels conducts learning sessions in Iowa and across the country with other women farmland owners like herself, exploring land conservation issues and how women could encourage their farmer-tenants to commit to sustainable soil and water practices.

Watch the complete segment here: [“How women in Iowa are leading farmland conservation efforts”](#).

Funding for Natural Resources Needs Your Help Now!

By Jim Obradovich

The focus of lawmakers is now beginning to turn from policy issues to money issues. Included in the money issues expected to be considered is **the Governor's proposed 1-cent increase in the state sales tax, which will fund the Natural Resources Trust Fund**. Please send a short email note or call your local State Representative and State Senator and urge them to:



- Support the proposed 1-cent increase in the state sales tax.
- The revenues will be used to fund our currently underfunded natural resources and soil and water conservation projects and programs.
- It's time to invest in our state's most valuable natural resources - soil and water.

*Jim Obradovich
President of The Capitol Group*

Here is the website to find out who your State Senator and State Representatives are:

<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find>

Legislation that remains eligible for further consideration:

SF 2060 - Scenic Byways Fund (M) The bill establishes a new Scenic Byways Fund in the Department of Transportation for the support, development, maintenance and enhancement, including litter prevention, of scenic byways. For each application or renewal of a vehicle registration county treasurers are required to ask each applicant to make a voluntary contribution to the fund. Approved by subcommittee.

SF 2047 - Wetlands and Native Prairie Tax Exemptions (M) This bill specifies that the receipt, by a property owner, under the federal wetlands reserve program or the federal agricultural conservation easement program shall not be considered a use for economic game. Referred to Ways and Means.

Regional Envirothon events and state competition canceled

The Envirothon regional and state events are now canceled in deference to the unfolding situation with coronavirus. Envirothon helps high school students cultivate a desire to learn more about our natural resources through competitive events. Teams take an in-depth look at wildlife, aquatic ecology, forestry, soils/land use, and current environmental issues that affect our natural resources. Regrettably, regional contests had to be halted.

In a statement from CDI Water Specialist Carlee Sabus, the decision to cancel was made to protect participants and staff: "In light of increasing concerns over COVID-19, CDI has canceled future Envirothon Regional events in Red Oak and Iowa City. After many discussions, **CDI then made the difficult decision of cancelling the Envirothon State Competition on April 27th** due to growing health concerns related to COVID-19."



Envirothon team from West Marshall, competing in Ankeny this month.

Partnership Day brings together policy makers and district stakeholders



It was a busy day in a crowded building during Partnership Day held in late February under the Iowa capitol rotunda. Surrounded by regional displays and partner booths, district commissioners from around the state sought out their respective legislators and promoted local and state conservation issues – if they could catch the state office holders between committee meetings! One-on-one opportunities to talk policy positions with the people who make policy is an excellent chance for district commissioners to build relationships and create movement toward a more environmentally sustainable Iowa.



Pictured top photo: CDI Executive Director John Whitaker (l.) meets with Rep. Thomas Gerhold (second from r.) and Region 7 Alternate Hank Wehrman (r.); bottom left: displays circled the rotunda floor, advancing conservation issues; bottom right: commissioners and legislators exchange views and ideas. Photos courtesy Alex Rausch/IDALS.

Boyer highlights years of conservation practice at local meeting of farmers and conservationists

CDI Vice President Jack Boyer opened the “Cover Crop Conference” in Durant, IA, earlier in March, focusing on current best-practices and farm research before an audience of local farmers interested in learning more about the promises of implementing cover crops in their operations. CDI was a co-sponsor along with IDALS, NRCS and others of the daylong event, that featured in-depth presentations and Q&A on a range of issues related to successful management of cover crops.

Boyer has years’ experience using a variety of conservation practices, including no-till, strip-till and cover crops.



CDI V.P. Jack Boyer, speaking at the “Cover Crop Conference” in Durant.