

---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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Office Manager: Brenda Shannon
Communications Coordinator: Joe Hayes

Office Phone: 515-289-8300

Office Address:

315 East 5th Street, Suite #134
Des Moines, IA. 50309

Website: <https://cdiowa.org>

From: CDI President Dennis Carney

I hope harvest preparations are going well. My best wishes go out to those of you dealing with the devastating wind and drought damage across our state. **Hopefully, you will consider the advantages of seeding cover crops on these acres.** Keeping a living root in the soil this winter will keep the soil biology healthy, and the roots will capture much of the excess nutrients applied but not removed by an unharvested or poor crop. Please promote the use of cover crops this fall in your district even more than usual.

CDI has rolled out information on our Saving Tomorrow's Agricultural Resources (S.T.A.R) program to those districts in the 2021 pilot area. If you are in this 25-county area **please encourage your district to take full advantage of this new way to incentivize conservation.** We will make evaluation forms available to interested producers across the state in the coming months.

A quick reminder for districts to please support CDI's annual scholarship program and a thank you to those who have sent donations. Lastly, **my heartfelt thanks to everyone running for one of Iowa's 500 Soil and Water Commissioner positions** in the November elections. You are the front line and our most important link to getting conservation work and ideals on the land.



BEE ready! CDI Poster Contest entries coming due

After two necessary delays, the CDI Poster Contest entries will finally get well-deserved attention for their patient young artists. This year's theme: **"Where would we BEE without Pollinators?"** Applicants should have their poster and entry form to their local SWCD office by October 2nd. The local SWCD will choose the local winner from each category by October 30th. Click here for complete details: [CDI Poster Contest Rules](#)

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

Great News! It is always good to start this report with good news. **On Monday, August 14th, NRCS announced that Jon Hubbert has been selected to be the next State Conservationist for Iowa.** Many of you know Jon since he has worked as an Assistant State Conservationist for programs in Iowa for several years now. In that role, he has helped increase the amount of program funding Iowa receives for critical soil conservation and water quality work. The increases in funding for EQIP, easement work, and CSP that we have received have come from Jon’s teamwork with former State Conservationist Kurt Simon, local NRCS staff, and you as local leaders.

A friend who I grew up with called the other evening to ask permission to bow hunt on one of our farms. As we talked, he mentioned COVID-19 and said that he had recovered from it. He said he had been very careful and almost always wore a mask, but likely one of the times he did not is when he picked up the virus. We are all getting very tired of staying home and away from other people. For those of us who have farms to ‘escape’ to, it is a little bit easier in that we can get outside but for those who do not, that need for human interaction has been increasing rapidly. I know that you as commissioners want to get together again and meet in person. **I will give you my opinion as a ‘healthy’ 63-year-old person, it is not safe yet to meet in person. As my friend found out, it only takes one exposure to make you really ill.**

We will be sending out a special *CDI Connections* addition early next month with an order form for CDI apparel. We are looking at a couple of different shirt styles for both women and men. This idea really came from some of our younger staff who work in local offices. They are proud of the work they are doing for CDI and would like to be able to show that pride when they go out to meet with the public. Please look for that special addition and be ready to show your pride in CDI!

Clark Porter named “Environmental Hero” for 2019

When Grundy County farmer Clark Porter learned DNR classified Black Hawk Creek an impaired waterway, he wanted to do something about it. He started on his farm, installing saturated buffers and other things to filter tile water finding its way to Black Hawk Creek. Those initial efforts grew in a short time to Porter’s leadership of a “rag tag army” of local conservation-minded people and the creation of the “Black Hawk Soil and Water Coalition” – and the honor of being named the “2019 Environmental Hero” in



Clark Porter “Environmental Hero”

August by MercyOne Cedar Valley. In 2017, Porter – an Environmental Specialist with IDALs – worked closely with local Black Hawk and Grundy County conservationists, county boards, mayors, and both Black Hawk and Grundy SWCD commissioners and staff to help guide the creation of the non-profit, licensed Black Hawk Creek Soil and Water Coalition, now currently using grant funds to support a watershed coordinator and sub-projects in the watershed. **“We’re not done,” says Porter, former coalition president who still volunteers with the group. “We’re just getting started”.**

Porter’s environmental ethic started young, paddling the waters of the Black Hawk Creek – part of a 217,000-acre watershed. As a founder and inaugural president of the Black Hawk Creek Coalition, Porter was able to leverage ethos into action. “You start out with a lot of hope, a very general idea that has more to do with the values that you want to hold, and the dreams you cherish for the land around you, whether it’s your farm or a watershed or your community,” he says. **“All of us share in this resource – it is a resource but it’s more than that, right? It’s actually our home. We treat it as if it’s not our home.**

That’s going to be our ruin if we don’t treat the world around us as our home.” Porter was honored as the “2019 Environmental Hero” in August by MercyOne Cedar Valley, during the “15th Annual Heroes Among Us” ceremony, held virtually in Waterloo, one of 15 categories honoring “everyday people who become everyday heroes”. The annual fund-raising event benefits projects for MercyOne Waterloo Foundation and MercyOne Cedar Falls Foundation. Sponsors include 93.5 The Mix & 1650 The Fan, News 7 KWWL and The Courier. “You aren’t always going to have a monetary justification” for some conservation projects, he says. “But you are going to have a commitment – and then you’re going to go find the monetary resources to make that commitment possible.”

An Appeal to SWCDs Statewide

Help support the CDI Scholarship Program!

CDI President Dennis Carney recently sent out a direct [appeal to SWCDs](#), asking each to contribute money that would help keep the CDI Scholarship Program funded for 2021. Carney repeated that request during the August CDI Annual Business Meeting. “One of the fun things and most profitable things we do at conference is our silent auction and live auction, which we have a lot of fun with, and raise some pretty good money,” Carney told Commissioners. **“That money sponsors our scholarship program.” Yet this year, by holding the annual meeting online, there was no auction.** That requires a new strategy to secure funds that reward the higher education endeavors of Iowa students who demonstrate interest in conservation and agriculture.

“We’re asking districts to directly contribute to that scholarship fund. You can notate it as ‘scholarship fund’ and send it to the CDI office,” said Carney. Traditionally the auction raises about \$10,000 to fund nine scholarships awarded to high school seniors who demonstrate leadership, character, scholastic achievement, and involvement in conservation. **Yet to date, end of September, the scholarship fund currently stands at \$2,700.**

It’s important to remember how these funds influence the ‘real-world’ goals and future of Iowa youth – and therefore of Iowa. Just ask a 2020 CDI Scholarship winner: **“Receiving the Conservation Districts of Iowa scholarship was an honor and a blessing,” says Chloe Calhoun,** the 2020 1st Place winner of a \$3,000 CDI Scholarship, representing Plymouth SWCD in Region 1. “This scholarship is helping me to pursue my goal of becoming a food scientist at the University of Nebraska and provided impactful relief to my first tuition bill.”

Calhoun was one of three 2020 CDI Scholarship winners. Collin Witte, Cerro Gordo SWCD, Region 3, earned second place with a \$2,000 scholarship; and Lydia Johnson, Polk SWCD, Region 6, won the third-place award of \$1,000. Additionally, a \$500 scholarship winner is chosen from each of the remaining six Regions.

“Applying for the CDI Scholarship required me to study and reflect on the importance of conservation and what I can do to make an impact on conservation of natural resources,” says Calhoun. **“I even found out that my grandparents have spent their whole farming life working on conservation measures on their farm.”**



Chloe Calhoun, 2020 CDI Scholarship 1st Place Winner

Please consider helping CDI meet its goal of \$10,000 to fund 2021 CDI Scholarships by contributing to this vital program. To learn more, or contribute, click here: [CDI Scholarships](#).

Call for entries: 2021 Midwest Environmental Education Conference

The 2021 Midwest Environmental Education Conference (MEEC) is inviting all SWCD commissioners, staff and others to their annual conference – including **a call for presentation proposals.** The conference is being held July 26-29, 2021 in Decorah. MEEC is a biannual, regional conference hosted on a rotating basis by Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois. **This year’s theme is *Exploring Community: Land, People, Water*** – exploring how to explore and re-define “community” to include all land, water, and people? Proposals due by November 1, 2020 and are to be submitted via Google Form link found on the Call for Presentations webpage: [2021 Conference Call for Presentations is now open](#). Please visit the conference website often for updates on keynote and plenary speakers! <https://meeconference.org/> .

Public meetings for five-year resource planning underway

Zoom application opens doors for Iowa SWCDs – without leaving the kitchen table!

In early September, the “new normal” arrived across Iowa SWCDs with the announcement that “Zoom” would now be available from CDI statewide for district meetings – with an added benefit: rebooting public participation in a district’s 5-year “Soil and Water Resource Conservation” planning. The announcement on September 3rd from Susan Kozak – Director, Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality – and CDI Executive Director John Whitaker means districts have access to the benefits of a premier version of the Zoom application. “Each of CDI’s planners now has their own Zoom license,” said the statement. “CDI is pleased to now offer every district the ability to take advantage of Zoom through our licenses.” Zoom is available to any district interested, for any purpose; a training session is available. For the five CDI Planners who execute the development of the state-mandated 5-year resource conservation plan, Zoom means mandatory public input into district planning is now possible. A few observations from three of those planners:

Claire Carlson, Northeast Iowa

“Recently, I helped host a Local Working Group Meeting for a District and it was obvious by the smiles on everyone’s face and laughter they shared that they were excited to be able interact with each other again.”

-Claire Carlson, NE Planner

“As we have transitioned to a more remote working world, the relationships that we had previously sometimes appear to be fading. **However, with Zoom, seeing and interacting with those familiar faces has become a whole lot easier.** I have been told countless times by CA’s that I have trained on Zoom how excited they are to finally be able to see their

Commissioners and interact with them in a more ‘face-to-face’ manner. While the bright light at the end of this dark tunnel may be emanating from a computer screen, it is still as present and radiant as ever.”

Nate Kilburg, Southeast Iowa

“I am so excited to offer Zoom as a tool for the districts! I will be reaching out to all my districts over the next several months to discuss this opportunity and how it can be used effectively to complete the 5-year Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plans. Adjusting to the “new normal” of our world may be difficult, but if we can keep an open mind and stay positive, **we can accomplish all of our conservation goals.**”

Jonathan Hendricks, Southwest Iowa

“The ability of the districts to adapt is inspiring. Amid such a tough situation, the partnerships have shined. **This important conservation work cannot and has not paused.** I am encouraged daily when I see creative solutions enacted to overcome obstacles. With the use of Zoom and hybrid meeting methods, we are running full steam ahead. At least four districts in the SW area are poised to have plans completed and approved in October/November – a testament to our thriving partnerships and joint commitment to serving our communities through thick and thin.”

NRCS Recommends Iowa Farmers No-Till Post-Derecho

by Jason Johnson, State Public Affairs Specialist, USDA-NRCS, Des Moines

Soil science and agronomy professionals with USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are advising Iowa farmers with crop damage from the Aug. 10 derecho that leaving their cropland soils undisturbed this fall and planting cover crops outweighs the costs of tillage. Mike Henderson, state agronomist with NRCS in Des Moines, says corn residue in downed corn will be more susceptible to decomposition. If you are interested in learning more about ways to manage damaged crops, including cover crop selection and application methods, email Mike Henderson at michael.henderson@usda.gov or visit your local NRCS office. **To read the full report by Jason Johnson, [click here.](#)**