

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

In spite of some weather challenges in parts of the state, I hope spring planting is winding down for most of you. We have been fortunate to have been spared any large spring floods this year, so far.

Your CDI Board of Directors held its quarterly meeting this past week and discussed a variety of topics. Reports on Envirothon and our scholarship program will be shared in *Connections* and we finished up discussion on this year's resolutions packet which will be mailed to districts soon.

Your district recently received information on CDI's proposed by-law changes to be voted on at our conference in August. Included with this information are a couple documents detailing why the board is proposing these changes and the positive effects they will have on our organization. Please discuss these proposals at your next couple district meetings and reach out to your CDI officers and board with questions. Every organization needs an update occasionally to stay relevant.

Plans for our two-day annual conference are moving forward, and I am excited about the presentations we have lined up so far. Please make sure you have checked out the [awards list on our website](#), so that CDI can recognize commissioners going above and beyond. Stay safe out there!

**Winneshiek SWCD commits funds to support local teacher sponsorship**

## MEEC: Exploring Community: Land, Water, People

The Iowa Conservation Education Coalition will be welcoming educators from across the Midwest to Decorah, Iowa, for the [2021 Midwest Environmental Education Conference](#), (MEEC) July 26-29, at Luther College. MEEC Executive Committee member Jerry Neppel recently announced the Winneshiek SWCD has committed \$1,000 to sponsor teachers within their district to attend the conference. This biennial conference rotates through the states of Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois and was last held in Iowa in 2013. MEEC brings together classroom teachers, naturalists, waste management educators, conservation professionals – and anyone who considers themselves an environmental educator – to learn, network, and grow as they work to connect others to our natural resources. [Click here to register.](#)

## Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

The legislative session has now ended and even though soil conservation and water quality partners were not ‘harmed’ in legislation, there were policy proposals we would have liked to see pass which did not. Legislation adding ‘soil health’ to the Iowa code is an example of things we wanted to see. The bill passed the House Agriculture Committee unanimously but did not see floor action. The bill is ready for next year, but I have serious concerns that our elected leaders don’t care too deeply about the issue. Realistically, soil health practices are what we have been doing for water quality and soil conservation, so why not add it to the code? One thing to keep in mind is that there is pending national legislation which would offer crop insurance discounts for implementing soil health practices, but the bill specifies that it would only be available in states which define soil health practices in state code. If the national legislation passes, Iowa producers will be left out at this point.

You have an opportunity to educate your local legislators now before they come back to Des Moines next January. The Partnership Day we host is effective, but one-on-one conversations are even more effective. You can invite your legislators to one of your regular meetings to discuss the issues that are important to you. This is an advantage we have in Iowa in that our legislators are accessible to us. I recommend taking advantage of this. Another way to communicate with your legislators is to invite them to a field day. It doesn’t have to be a field day that your local SWCD sponsors, it can be a soil conservation or water quality field day that you plan to attend. Bring them along! Our legislators want to hear from you so talk to them!

## Soil & water investment update from Iowa legislative session

*Jim Obradovich*  
*President of The Capitol Group*

A significant investment into the conservation of the state’s soil and water continued during the 2021 session of the Iowa Legislature, which concluded this year’s work just short of midnight on May 19. Appropriations for conservation projects and programs again totaled over \$26.5 million dollars. Here is a quick look at some of the appropriations of interest:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water Quality Initiative (State General Fund) - \$3.0 million</li> <li>• Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - \$1.0 million</li> <li>• Watershed Protection - \$900,000</li> <li>• Conservation Reserve Program - \$900,000</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soil and Water Conservation - \$8.325 million</li> <li>• Soil and Water Conservation Administration - \$3.8 million</li> <li>• Water Quality Initiative (Enviro First Fund) - \$2.375 million</li> <li>• Water Quality Initiative (Rebuild Iowa Fund) - \$5.2 million</li> </ul> |
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The successful Water Quality Infrastructure Program will continue until at least 2039 thanks to the efforts of Rep. Norlin Mommsen of DeWitt. Mommsen added a 10-year extension provision to the Agriculture and Natural Resources Appropriations bill during House debate. The annual transfer of \$15 million of gaming revenues to the program was set to end on June 30, 2029. The Resource Enhancement and Protection Fund (REAP) will continue until at least 2026. The House and Senate also agreed to the extension of the program until 2026 as part of the Ag and DNR spending bill. Without the extension, the popular program would have ended in 2023. Thanks to all the commissioners who contacted lawmakers regarding the importance of our natural resources. Also special thanks to CDI Executive Director John Whitaker for his unwavering dedication to soil health and water quality.

Team from Mitchell SWCD wins virtual event matching competitors from throughout Iowa

## St. Ansgar FFA advances to National Envirothon

The Envirothon team from St. Ansgar FFA will represent Iowa in the National Envirothon contest, to be held over several days beginning Monday, July 26. Like the Iowa contest, the nationals will be held virtually. According to CDI Program Manager Carlee Sabus, the online Iowa Envirothon event – though perhaps missing the fun environment of competitive teams gathered in one location – successfully challenged more than 40 Iowa teams in the environmental competition. “It was great that we still had the amount of participation that we did,” said Sabus. “People still wanted to participate and be involved in the competition. We’re glad it worked out as well as it did – and we’re excited to have a normal competition this year!”



Teams take four tests – wildlife, aquatic ecology, forestry, and soils/land use – which offer in-depth explorations of current environmental issues that affect our natural resources. The five Iowa teams with the highest scores in those tests then are each presented with a [conservation-focused scenario](#) and work together to create a video presentation that responds to the scenario challenge. Those five highest-scoring teams included Diamond Trail FFA, DNR (Decorah Nerd Republic), Cooks Critters, Glenwood Envirothon and St. Ansgar FFA. Although all presentations were excellent, a judging panel unanimously chose St. Ansgar FFA (Mitchell County) to represent Iowa in the national Envirothon. Congratulations to all those teams throughout Iowa who participated, with special thanks to the local teachers and team supervisors who made the competition possible! Best of luck to St. Ansgar FFA!

## Celebrating Iowa Soil & Water Conservation Week!



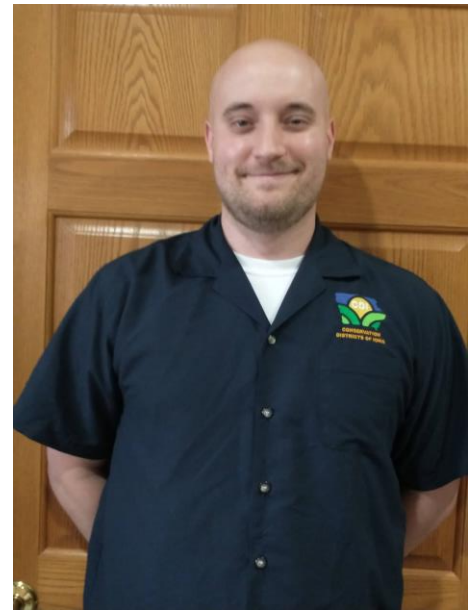
Clockwise from top left: Iowa SWCD sponsors “Trees for 5<sup>th</sup> Graders”; with Cherokee SWCD, Aurelia Women’s Federation Club toss milkweed mudballs into Aurelia’s Kiwanis Wetland; with Delaware SWCD, celebrating “A Party for the Planet”; Guthrie SWCD Commissioner Bryan Coffman presents NACD workbook to Guthrie Center Elementary Principal Diane Flanery. [Click here](#) learn more about these photos and view other activities during Iowa’s 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Soil and Water Conservation Week!



## Planner Profile: Nate Kilburg, CDI Planner for SE Iowa

A career that started out exploring underground to locate unexploded munitions soon led Nate Kilburg to discovering something even more unsettling beneath the surface: the contaminations we pour into the earth that affect our food and quality of life. Today, Nate applies his environmental background to helping 24 SWCDs in Southeastern Iowa develop and draft their 5-year “Soil and Water Resource Conservation” (SWRC) plans.

“Overall, it’s going really smooth,” says Kilburg. “I enjoy the mission of CDI. What we’re all doing – conservation, long-term planning, having a role in what districts want to accomplish over several years and help make their farmland, their communities more sustainable – that’s a great concept to me, especially with all the things I’ve learned in my work in Indiana.” Kilburg grew up on his family’s farm in Jackson County, attending high school in Maquoketa and graduating from Iowa State University in 2016 with a geology degree. His first job out of college was with a company doing geophysical surveys to remove unexploded ordinances at old army bases in California and Virginia. But in accepting a new position with the Indiana Office of Land Quality, Kilburg turned his full attention to environmental impacts of a different kind: “I learned a lot not only about the geology they use in environmental work but all the sources of contaminants that get into our groundwater, our soil, especially from landfills – how things travel through the ground. It’s an important job to know what’s getting into the water you drink, the surface water, where it’s all going. That really opened my eyes to how important it is, especially with climate change.”



CDI SE Iowa Planner Nate Kilburg

Returning to the Iowa family farm to help his mother recover from surgery, Kilburg soon accepted an offer from CDI to join the 5-Year Planning Team – just as Covid hit. Progress was slow at first. “Once we made the transition to Zoom things really took off,” he says. As the spring and summer seasons progress, he believes the planning process will equally make headway with more face-to-face meetings possible. “Every time I work with a district the first thing I tell them is ‘That’s why I’m here, to make this as smooth and painless as possible. I’ll do all the heavy lifting for you all so we can get these plans done!’”

## Congratulations to our 2021 CDI Scholarship winners!

**Thank you to all the Iowa SWCDs that contributed funds to support the CDI Scholarship Program, and congratulations to these worthy recipients – Iowa’s future conservationists!**

[Click here to learn more.](#)

**1st Place – Morgan Dunn, Polk SWCD, Region 6, \$3,000**

**2nd Place – Krista Goth, Cherokee SWCD, Region 1, \$2,000**

**3rd Place – Dylan Engelbrecht, Scott SWCD, Region 7, \$1,000**

**Our Regional Winners – With an award of \$500/Scholarship**

CDI Region 2 – Madalyn Moline, Pocahontas SWCD

CDI Region 3 – Gabe Grabau, Howard SWCD

CDI Region 4 – Madalyn Palmer, Allamakee SWCD

CDI Region 5 – Jennifer Holiday, Adair SWCD

CDI Region 8 – Tallen Myers, Montgomery SWCD

CDI Region 9 – Macy Moore, Mahaska SWCD