

---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.



November 2021
Volume 3, Number 2

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From: CDI President Ramona Nitz

When I became the president of CDI a few months ago, my hope was that I'd be spending this next year visiting with commissioners all across the state. My hope was realized that very evening as I had been invited to speak at the Plymouth SWCD's 75th Anniversary celebration. Everyone in attendance that night left with many "party favors"! My favorite was a photocopy of the September 1959 edition of "Iowa Soil and Water" magazine. It was, back then, the "official publication of the Iowa Association of Soil District Commissioners and the Iowa State Watersheds Association".

This particular issue featured Plymouth County. I confess to having read this old magazine from cover to cover. Even the dozens of old advertisements were fun to see. But it was the various articles that were most interesting.

The "Spotlight" gave us a glance at the lives of the Plymouth County commissioners in 1959. I couldn't help but smile as I realized that these men were very much like the commissioners I've worked with these past few years – hardworking, conservation-minded and very involved in their communities. As a retired high school teacher, I really did enjoy reading the article about Vocational Ag instruction in the county and how the commissioners participated in the soil and water conservation unit. And in one of the county's schools, the Soil and Water Conservation Plan was used as the guide for its Vo-Ag Farm Management course. One page of the magazine was devoted to the idea of stewardship of the soil and those who shared their thoughts were two members of the clergy. They wrote of the readers' "moral obligation to conserve". I wonder if many other districts have such interesting works in their archives. If any of you do have items such as this one, let me know. I'd like the opportunity to learn more about what was most important to those commissioners from all those years ago. Much has changed, I know. But much has not.

SAVE THE DATE! CDI Annual Conference, August 22-23, 2022
Gateway Hotel and Conference Center, Ames, Iowa!

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

We are all mentors to someone. Given this fact, CDI is looking for local commissioners who would be willing to mentor farmers who want to try conservation farming practices. We all started with conservation at some point and learned by doing and to have a mentor would have sped the learning process for us. We have had a tremendous, positive impact on soil conservation and water quality but honestly much more needs to be done very quickly. The program we will start will reward either the commissioner who mentors or their respective district with a small stipend for their time. The largest amount of time in this process will be to find the farmers who want to try conservation, and we will help in any way we can.

One of the great programs we have is our scholarship program. We offer an opportunity to young people who want to make a difference in conservation and agriculture. The auction at the annual conference supports this effort and we are very thankful of the generosity of all who donate to the auction. Unfortunately, since our annual conference was virtual last summer, we did not have the opportunity to receive those donations. Without those donations and auction bids, we may not be able to have scholarships for 2022. We will instead have to take funds from our general budget line. Please consider anything you or your district can do to continue this important work with young leaders.

We are planning to hold our spring regional meetings in early March of 2022. Our current timeline is to start on Monday February 28, and conclude the following Thursday, March 10. We will have updates from IDALS, and NRCS as well as other partners. It will be a busy two weeks, but we do look forward to seeing many of you at these important meetings.

“Partnership Day” moves out of Des Moines, into local districts



Directors hold first meeting at new CDI office location.

The CDI Board of Directors voted to change strategies for bringing SWCD commissioners together with Iowa legislators, moving away from CDI’s participation in the annual “Partnership Day” event at the Des Moines capitol rotunda, and putting the focus back on locally sponsored legislator events.

At the November 16 board meeting – the first in-person CDI board meeting since February 2020 – commissioners agreed a more effective way to educate and inform Iowa policy makers is to encourage SWCDs to invite their Iowa legislators for local face-to-face sessions. CDI Region 1 Director John Kooiker, Sioux SWCD, said the change will greatly enhance opportunities for commissioners statewide to meet with policymakers. “Most politics and government are determined at the local level,” said Kooiker, a former legislator in

the Iowa House from Hull, representing Iowa’s 4th District. “It starts with ideas from people right there on the land. And because Des Moines is centrally located, it leaves people from (outside) areas having to travel long distances to go to Partnership Day,” he said. “So this decision makes it more accessible. There will be more participation from the local citizens as far as input into what’s going on around conservation of the land and the water and the soil.” Kooiker said legislators are typically available on weekends when Town Hall meetings are scheduled and can be invited to SWCD meetings to get input or engaged at events such as local banquets. “Sometimes you hear about an ‘urban and rural divide’. In many cases our legislators are not people very familiar with farming and agriculture, and so we need to educate them as to the needs of what’s going on out there in the country. We only have a limited amount of good tillable land as well as pastureland and forest land, and we need to be good stewards of the resources that God has given us.”

CDI Poster Contest State Winners Ready for Nationals!

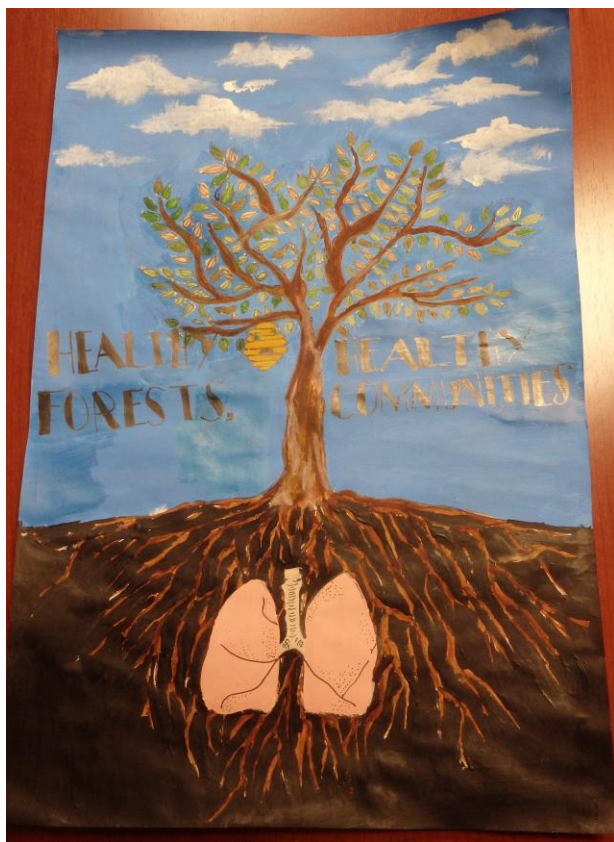
Five talented young Iowa artists will represent our districts at the NACD Annual Meeting in February, promoting [“Healthy Forests = Healthy Communities”](#). Click here for a [complete list](#) of state and region winners.



Region 1 (K-1): Mikayla Heller, Sioux SWCD



Region 5 (2nd-3rd): Camdyn Coffman, Guthrie SWCD



Region 9 (10th-12th): Liberty Lightfoot,
Keokuk SWCD



Region 2 (4th-6th): Grace Stout, Sac SWCD



Region 1 (7th-9th): Grace Poppema, Sioux SWCD

2021 CDI Annual Conference Webinars

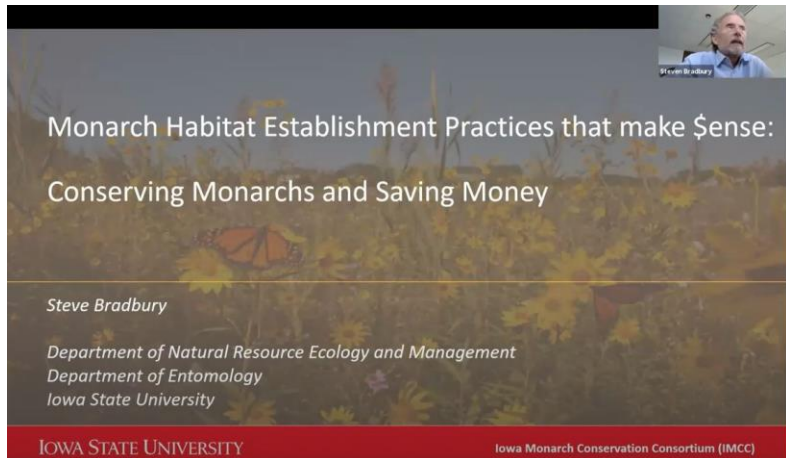
The 2021 CDI Annual Conference mixed business, online socializing and learning, offering a series of conservation-focused webinars – averaging 30 minutes – from knowledgeable Iowa sustainability specialists who share their experience and data. Click links below to watch a presentation of interest to you, or go to [CDI Annual Conference Webinars](#) for more details on each presentation and download the complete list.

How Healthy Soils Can Store Carbon

Do you know how healthy your soils are? Jerry Hatfield, retired USDA ARS Soil Scientist explores opportunities for enhancing your soil to provide resilience against weather extremes and increasing your profits on each field.

Women in Conservation—A Critical Link

“Oh, the stories we could tell!” Tanya Meyer and Jean Eells share reflections from each of their experiences on how much conservation in agriculture can gain when women get support to get problems solved.



Establishing Good Pollinator Habitat

ISU Entomologist Steve Bradbury discusses the importance of establishing habitat that feeds monarchs throughout their life cycle and how this benefits all pollinators.

Writing an Effective Conservation Lease

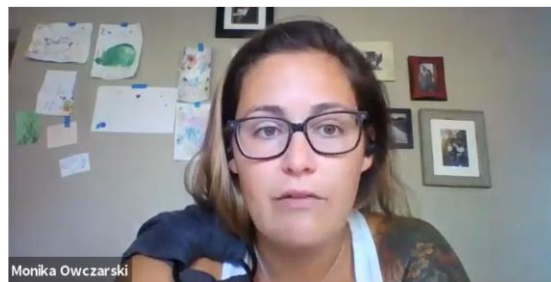
Learn about conservation leases! Chad Hertz has generations of experience in farm management and farm leases, and Black Hawk SWCD Assistant Commissioner Mike Henning has written his own conservation lease.

Grazing Cover Crops to Improve Soil Health

Iowa is blessed with some of the most productive soils in the world and we need to keep them productive and healthy. NRCS Grazing specialists Kayla Creek and Stacy Prassis present their recommendations for cover crop mixes, timing of grazing, and their value to your operation.

Urban Agriculture—A Fresh Concept!

Hear the stories of two Iowa women who produce food in urban settings and sometimes for different reasons. Bonnie Riggan and Monika Owczarski discuss the hurdles they have crossed and the satisfaction they have received in feeding people, educating consumers, and making a living doing that.



Monika Owczarski shares urban ag experiences.

Telling Your Conservation Story Effectively

Jason Johnson discusses “the creative side” of conservation communication – identifying topics, interviewing, ‘brand’ and ‘voice’, drafting copy and editing. Joe Hayes focuses on the social media and technical side – Facebook and Twitter, developing a webpage, electronic brochures and newsletters.

CDI promotes “S.T.A.R” initiative at Drake Law School 2021 SOIL conference

“Our Soils Our Future”: SWCD commissioners hear vision for Iowa’s soil, water and land – and actions needed to get us there



Right top -- Neil Shaffer, Howard County SWCD Watershed Coordinator; right bottom and above at podium -- Polk SWCD Commissioner John Norwood

Iowa Soil & Water Conservation Districts were well represented both in audience attendance and stage presence at the SOIL 2021 Conference – **“Our Soil Our Future”** – organized and hosted by the Drake University Agriculture Law Center in Des Moines, November 17th. The daylong event featured speakers presenting challenges and potential solutions to Iowa’s sustainability issues. As an event sponsor, CDI promoted the “Saving Tomorrow’s Agriculture Resources” – S.T.A.R. – with a display and [STAR Flyer](#) handout.



If you are curious to learn more about conservation practices and the *Saving Today’s Agriculture Resources (STAR)* program, please visit the [CDI S.T.A.R. webpage](#) for more information and to sign up.