

---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.



December 2021
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From: CDI President Ramona Nitz

How wonderful it is to see folks you haven't seen in so long! Yesterday, I got to see Tom and Linda Bindner who I haven't seen in person since before COVID. Tom retired as a commissioner for Cherokee SWCD at the end of last year but we waited until now to have his retirement celebration. Tom was a commissioner here for 20 years. He was elected when Linda decided to retire from the commission after 22 years. So 42 years between them! (They are still involved as assistant commissioners and we are so grateful for that.) Have any of your districts celebrated retiring commissioners recently? Let us know so we can celebrate with you!

I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a very happy and healthy New Year. I look forward to seeing you all in the new year as I travel to your area for regional meetings. More info on that will be sent your way soon.

Ramona

Season's greetings from staff and friends at Conservation Districts of Iowa!

Thanks to you – district commissioners, assistant commissioners, and local district staff – for all you do! The important decisions you make and the work you do to promote sustainable conservation practices help restore and preserve the quality of life in our great state. Merry Christmas!

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

Starting the week of December 13, we will be expanding our communications efforts by sending my biweekly board update to the CAs as well. Since I started with CDI, I have tried to keep the board of directors and our partners informed on what is happening by sending a brief update on a biweekly basis. I recently found out that several years ago, a weekly update had been sent to the CAs. This was far enough before my time that I was not aware this. I am proud of the work we do and am willing to let everyone know.

Have you ever wondered how much more conservation could be accomplished in your district if you had staff devoted to personal contact with farmers and landowners? Research has shown that the best way to increase conservation on the ground is one on one personal contact with farmers. I served as a County Supervisor in Van Buren County and for a time, we provided funds to our local SWCD to hire a part time staff person to meet one on one with farmers on their farms. The results were good projects built in strategic locations which prevented a stream from cutting a new channel and ruining our road system close to that stream. I believe we could accomplish a tremendous amount for soil conservation, water quality, and regenerative farming practices by having ‘conservation salespersons’ in each district, and I believe they should work for the districts.

I recently received a phone call from a commissioner who I have known for many years. His concern is that it is time to pay elected commissioners for their time. I agree! I suggested that since we don’t have official policy in our resolutions, a resolution proposed to the annual conference needs to be submitted. I will say that to accomplish this goal, you will need to build personal relationships with your local legislators. I will gladly speak for you at the Capitol in Des Moines, but you can speak from personal experience about the amount of time you dedicate to your important work. In last month’s Connections, Region 1 Director John Kooiker, who served in the Iowa House of Representatives, pointed out that legislators want to hear from their constituents.

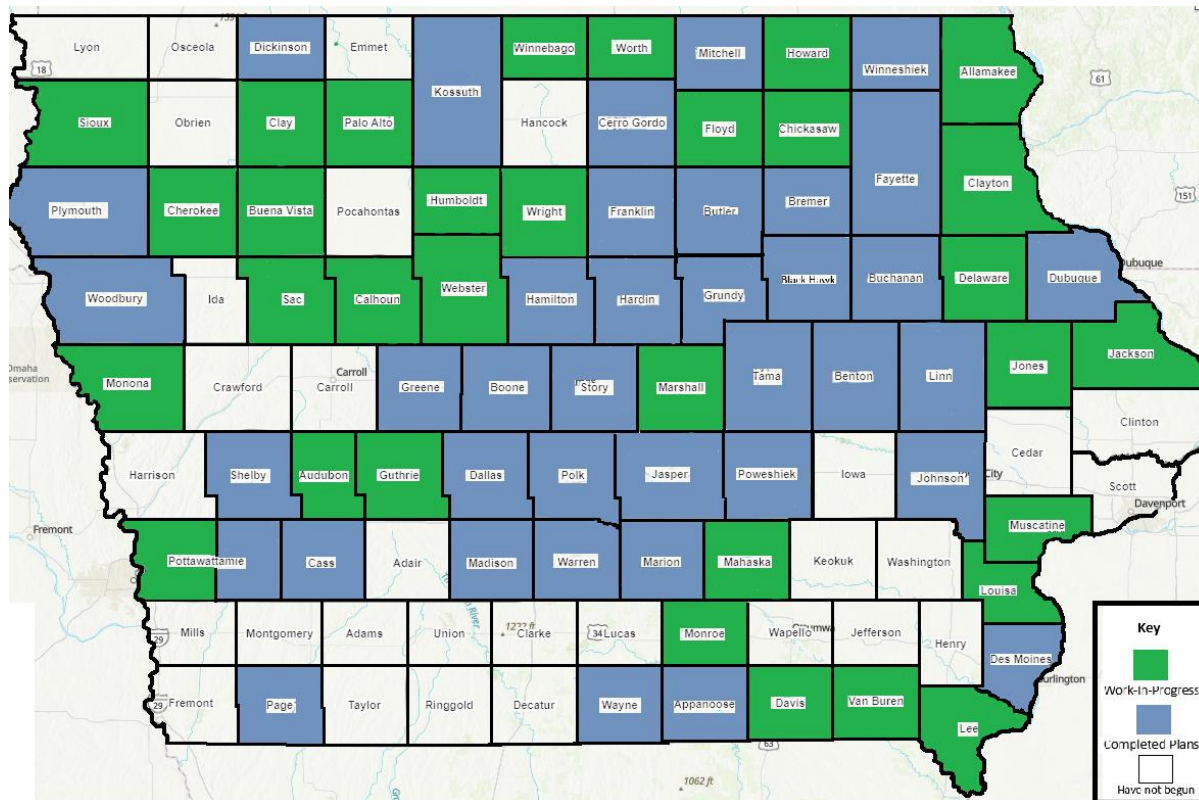
2022 CDI Scholarship Program Application Process & Deadlines

- **December 2021:** Participating SWCDs get the word out about the 2022 Conservation Scholarship.
- **Friday, February 18, 2022:** Applicants must submit their scholarship applications to the SWCD Office in the county which they reside in. Visit [District Map](#) and select your county on the map to locate your county SWCD Office.
- **Friday, March 11, 2022:** The local SWCD chooses a county application to forward on to their CDI Regional Director.
- **Friday, March 25, 2022:** The CDI Regional Director chooses a regional application to forward on for consideration at the state level.
- **Friday, April 8, 2022:** A judging team of CDI Officers, Regional Directors & Alternates then make the final selections. There are nine CDI regions.
- **Tuesday, May 6, 2022:** CDI will then alert the local SWCD offices with winning applicants. Local SWCD offices will in turn notify the student, school & local media.

For more details, log on to [CDI Scholarship Program](#)

Momentum grows in district planning process

'Five-Year SWRCP' Year-End Update



As a challenging year comes to a close, 70 of 100 SWCDs have either begun the planning process (green) or completed their drafting (blue) of the state-mandated 5-year “Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plan (SWRCP)”, a statewide effort that will yield great benefits to the quality of life in Iowa. Three CDI Planners who help facilitate the process with their assigned districts share year-end perspective:

Nate Kilburg, SE Iowa
 “For me, the best moment of satisfaction when working on the 5-year planning process is the moment when a district approves their plan, and you can see and feel the accomplishment of what we built together. Moving ahead into 2022, I hope to reach out to the remainder of the districts I’m looking forward to working with on this project and dive into completing their plans. I believe with all the available resources we have now, including Zoom and other online platforms for communication, we can effectively complete most plans in 2022.”

Madison Conley, NW Iowa
 “Public meetings are a critical part of the planning process, and we rely on constructive participation from local community citizens. Community members’ participation is active and thought-provoking. Their input has been a valuable resource to draw upon when the Commissioners and I work together in the goal-forming process. The district staff have been an instrumental part of the planning process. The communication I have with the staff is a huge part of how I operate and helps get the planning process on track for success. Whether sending invitations, setting up Zoom, or giving me necessary information for the plan, they are always there with the answers!”

Claire Carlson, NE Iowa
 “In Northeast Iowa, 14 out of 24 districts have completed their 5-Year Plan. Nearly every single one of these districts has begun implementing the goals that they established during the planning process. Here are just two of many things they’ve accomplished: Grundy County had more landowners sign up for cover crops than ever before due to improved outreach – a key focus in their plan – and Hardin County reached out to out-of-state landowners and received two monetary donations. So many SWCDs have begun putting a conscious effort into expanding their current conservation efforts. This process works!”

Invitation to SWCDs and their local youth

ICEC Game Jam Registration will open January 3rd!

Are you looking for a way to inspire curiosity, creativity, collaboration, optimism, and critical thinking skills for students in your local schools or youth groups? An Iowa conservation group is reaching out to Iowa SWCDs with an invitation to help local children learn about critical sustainability issues through a fun and engaging program: “Game Jam”. Games can help address real-world challenges, encourage systems thinking, and promote active engagement, making them particularly well-suited to conservation education. Educational Game Jams provide opportunities for students to develop games around a theme. [Game Jam registration](#) will be open January 3 – February 18, 2022.

This year’s Environmental Game Jam is a collaborative effort between the Iowa Conservation Education Coalition (ICEC), the Iowa DNR’s Project WILD program, and students from the University of Iowa College of Education. Each topic includes instructions for the students and an activity guide on various environmental issues in modern-day society, plus additional resources educators can use along with, or outside of the Game Jam activity.



Game Jam 2021-2022 topics:

- Endangered species
- Water Pollution
- Invasive Species
- Renewable energy

Details

- Open to students in grades 3-12 (Grades 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12)
- Game can be analog (card games, board games, role playing games) or digital
- Teams should be 2-5 students
- Teacher/educator must register all teams!
- Games should help people better understand the selected topic.
- [Sign up for Game Jam Q & A Zoom](#) on February 2, 2022
- Register your team(s)

[Learn more on ICEC’s Game Jam website!](#)

Teams must submit their game description and up to a 4-minute video by March 6, 2022, to be included in judging. A link to the submission form will be shared with all educators after they register. Games will be judged and winners selected in March 2022. Winners will be recognized in April (date TBD).

- Winners will be selected for the following categories:
 - Grades 3-5, analog; Grades 3-5, digital
 - Grades 6-8, analog; Grades 6-8, digital
 - Grades 9-12, analog; Grades 9-12, digital
- All topics will be combined for judging.

Contact ICEC for additional questions! exec@iowaee.org

NO-TILL AND COVER CROPS IMPROVE FARMER'S PROFITABILITY

Calhoun County farmer Dwight Dial incorporated no-till into his corn and soybean operation more than 30 years ago to keep the soil where it belonged – on his farm for generations to come. He added cover crops 10 years ago.

Dial balances his soil health goals while maximizing crop profitability. Organic matter rises along with his yield curve. "The organic matter with a traditional tillage program is

0.5% to 1.0%," he said. "Testing done on my farm by the Soil Health Partnership reveals my organic matter is 5% to 8%."

The rise in organic matter is retaining moisture and nutrients. "For every 1% of organic matter, I'm reducing my nitrogen by 15 to 20 pounds per acre," he said. "That's a significant savings each year. I also see value in how my system improves water quality."



LESS IS MORE

Dial is determined to be a low-cost producer. "I haven't purchased a piece of tillage equipment since I started farming," he said. "Limiting passes across a field has saved a small fortune in equipment wear and tear as well as fuel."

The less the soil is disturbed, the more he gains. "My soil handles a heavy rain event better than my neighbors' in traditional tillage programs," he said. "And during a drought, that water-holding capacity helps sustain the crop better."

Dial says the cheapest cover crop and application will do the job. He estimates his cover crop cost per acre for corn is \$35.60 and for

soybeans it's \$26.65. "Find out what conservation funding programs are available and get started," he said.

"I don't think a cover crop system needs to be complicated or expensive to be effective. I'm reaping more in benefits than I'm spending."

BUILDING A SOIL HEALTH LEGACY

Dial says it's hard for him to put a dollar figure on what no-till and cover crops have contributed to his bottom line. "I'm using fewer inputs in my herbicide and nutrient programs, and I'm saving on fuel and equipment," he said. "But how do you put a dollar figure on water retention during a wet spring or a dry summer? I'm focused on returning the land to the next generation in better condition than I found it. I know I'm doing that, and how do you put a value on that?"

Dial encourages farmers to start small with cover crops, even if that means selecting an area of a field with compaction or poor drainage.



Dwight Dial
Calhoun County

I was determined to make no-till and cover crops work on my farm and now they are working for me.

BECOME AN IOWA CORN STEWARDSHIP ADVOCATE

Iowa corn farmers and landowners are invited to join the Iowa Corn Stewardship Advocate program. You'll receive notifications about environmental issues, information about soil health and water quality, and be alerted of stewardship events where you can connect with other farmers.

To enroll visit iowacorn.org/water.

