

# ---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.



**August 2022**  
**Volume 3, Number 11**

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### **From: CDI President Ramona Nitz**

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who participated in the 2022 CDI Annual Conference in Ames this past week. I realize that's it's not always easy to take a couple days out of one's schedule to drive to the middle of the state to attend a conference. So I very much appreciate that so many of you did just that.

We've heard so many positive things about the conference and we are grateful for your kind words. We realize, of course, that there are always things to be improved upon and we want to hear your thoughts on those, too. You all have my email and cell phone information so you can contact me with your thoughts. The required annual business meeting went well and everyone had a chance to voice their opinions during discussion of the resolutions and by-law changes. Results of the voting will be made available to all districts.



*Glass blowing demo during tour*

This year's guest tour was a huge success! One participant told me that she's been on many tours through various conferences that she has attended with her husband over the years. She said that this was, by far, the best one she's ever attended. We are so happy to hear this!

This week, I will travel to Des Moines to Secretary Naig's office to join representatives from IDALS and the State Soil Committee in discussing the budget that he'll be sending to the Governor's office.

Soon it will be time for the Clay County Fair. I'll be volunteering there at the canning and baking building or will be driving the golf carts most every day this year (No, I've never lived in Clay County; I just have loved that fair for as long as I can remember!) so maybe I'll run into some of you there in Spencer! That'd be so fun!

-- Ramona

## Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

Thank you to all our Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners who took the time to attend the 2022 Annual Conference. It was great to see everyone and have an in person meeting again. Following up on the conference, we will be holding internal meetings to go over what went well and what we need to improve. One big thing we would like to improve on is attendance. In September, your district will receive a short survey asking for your input. We would ask that the survey be completed during a meeting so you can discuss your answers. There will be one survey for each district with room for individual comments along with group answers.

New legislation passed on the federal level will significantly increase the amount of work toward soil health and those practices which support increasing soil health. I have not looked at final numbers but at first glance, it appears that NRCS funding will double for the next five years.

We have filled the two vacant Private Lands Wildlife Specialist positions. We continue to receive applications for the three open Wetland Easement Team Specialists; we have interviewed several people but have not found the skills we are looking for yet. If you know anyone interested in working in the conservation field, please have them check our website for openings.

### 2022 CDI Scholarship Recipients

### *College-bound Iowa high school seniors earn well-deserved recognition*

Thanks to the contributions of Iowa SWCDs statewide, CDI will contribute to the future education goals of select graduating seniors. Criteria for recipients include involvement, leadership and character, career, scholastic achievement, and conservation message.



#### \$500 Recipients by Region

- 3 – Nathan Brumm  
Mitchell SWCD
- 4 – Ellen Kirby  
Dubuque SWCD
- 5 – Ashlyn Vorthmann  
West Pott SWCD
- 7 – Emma Schoonover  
Louisa SWCD
- 8 – Amara Orth  
Mills SWCD
- 9 – Jayce Reed  
Monroe SWCD

*(Left to right:)*

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:** Hunter Thilges, Region 2, Kossuth SWCD, \$3,000

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place:** Brady Van Meeteren, Region 1, O'Brien SWCD, \$2000

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place:** Marissa Lindemann, Region 6, Story SWCD, \$1000

## Conservation Districts of Iowa 76<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

### “Soil and water is our past, our present, our future.”

The Conservation Districts of Iowa held our 76th Annual Conference this week at the Gateway Center in Ames, August 22-23 – the first chance for Iowa Soil & Water Conservation District commissioners and guests to gather face-to-face since 2019. The theme “How important is water to you?” gave attendees expert presentations that offered updates and insights regarding the challenges of restoring and maintaining water

quality in Iowa’s rural and urban areas. “Soil and water is our

past, our present, our future,” CDI Lobbyist Jim Obradovich told the gathered commissioners at the first day morning business meeting. “This room is filled with authentic authorities on this topic. You do this because ‘I value soil and water in this state’. Whatever motivates you is authentic and appreciated. You’re all heroes to me.”



Luncheon speaker Ag Secretary Mike Naig



Districts debate and vote on key resolutions and changes to bylaws

### Business Meeting Voting Results

Commissioners representing 51 Iowa SWCDs (and 121 proxy votes – commissioners voting but who could not attend) gathered on the morning of day one to consider a number of resolutions and proposed by-law changes, and elect leadership for the next year. President Ramona Nitz and Vice President Jeri Thornsberry were both re-elected to a second term as leadership of CDI. Of three resolutions that required debate, two were passed by vote: “Summer Conservation Construction Window”, “Summer Construction Incentive Program”. One resolution failed: “Increase Maximum Cover Crop Acres Eligible for Cost Share”.

Also considered was a proposed change in the definition of CDI membership, from individual commissioners to districts, which failed. Minor changes in bylaws to clean up errors were approved. Additionally, commissioners approved establishing a new class of CDI membership called “affiliate members of CDI”, who would not have voting rights, but can participate in the on-going mission of CDI.



CDI President Ramona Nitz with Hank Wehrman, Benton SWCD, 2022 Outstanding SWCD Commissioner



Dave Lubben, Jones SWCD  
2022 Conservation Farmer of the Year



## NW Prairies 2022 Conservation Bus Tour

### ***Three-day journey north explores soil health, regenerative practices***

A three-day bus trip to North Dakota sponsored by northwest Iowa SWCDs gave producers, NRCS staff, and SWCD commissioners the chance to see soil health in action at three farm and ranch locations known for leadership in adopting soil health and regenerative ag practices with no-till, cover crops and livestock.

NRCS Resource Team Leader Ann Byers, Sibley, who works with the Osceola SWCD and helped organize the trip, said the journey north was an opportunity to get first-hand insight into how these operations implement new conservation practices, and to network with other local producers who share an interest in soil health practices, conservation and regenerative ag practices.

“This is a way for districts to expand out and do things that actively promote conservation and soil health,” said Byers. Four Iowa SWCDs – Osceola, Lyon, O’Brien and Sioux – helped sponsor the trip, which was organized and planned in North Dakota. Osceola SWCD Commissioner Alvin Van Wyk and Sioux SWCD John Kooiker, with wife Sherry, joined the tour that also included five ag producers and four NRCS office staff. Byers estimates 125 people participated in the tour in North Dakota.



Tour guests visit a high tunnel greenhouse at Menoken Farm in North Dakota.



Byers said the experience of the tour was enlightening, even to long-time conservation-minded producers. “One of our producers told us ‘I’ve been doing no-till for several years, keeping soil covered with residue, thinking I was doing the right thing; now after seeing this it kind of clicked – yeah, I have the cover out there, I have the armor, but I don’t have the biology without the cover crops.’” The trip, made August 9-11, toured three locations well-known for conservation and regenerative ag practices: [Menoken Farm](#), [Prairie Hills Ranch](#), and [Black Leg Ranch](#).



Science Festival Trail

# ***CDI helps promote conservation, the fun of science to area parents, youth***

The Conservation Districts of Iowa joined 20 other science and environment-focused groups riverside in West Des Moines for “Science Festival Trails” to help remind people – and particularly young people – that *science* is still the best way to make sense of the world around us.



“We just want to promote science in a fun way,” says Ruth Henderson, board treasurer of [Science Iowa](#), the main organizer of the August 7<sup>th</sup> event, taking place at Raccoon River Park. “There have been so many attacks on science, so we started a really positive fun event to promote science literacy, promote STEM; we want to promote conservation, and maybe even volunteerism – there are opportunities in some organizations to take an active role.” The display from CDI – visited by interested parents and children throughout the event – promoted the annual Poster Contest – part of the nationwide NACD Poster Contest that challenges school-aged youth to participate in environmental art based on specific themes.

“Our goals for Science Iowa itself are that we want to promote science in the public interest,” says Henderson. “We want to publicly support research and evidence-based policy – so we’re trying to make science more accessible to everyone.” Henderson says a date is pending for the return of Science Festival Trails next year – with a likely return to Raccoon River Park. “We want to be a family friendly event,” she says. “Great to have parents there to take young people around, see what kinds of opportunities are available to them.” The Science Festival Trail is made possible by donations from area business.



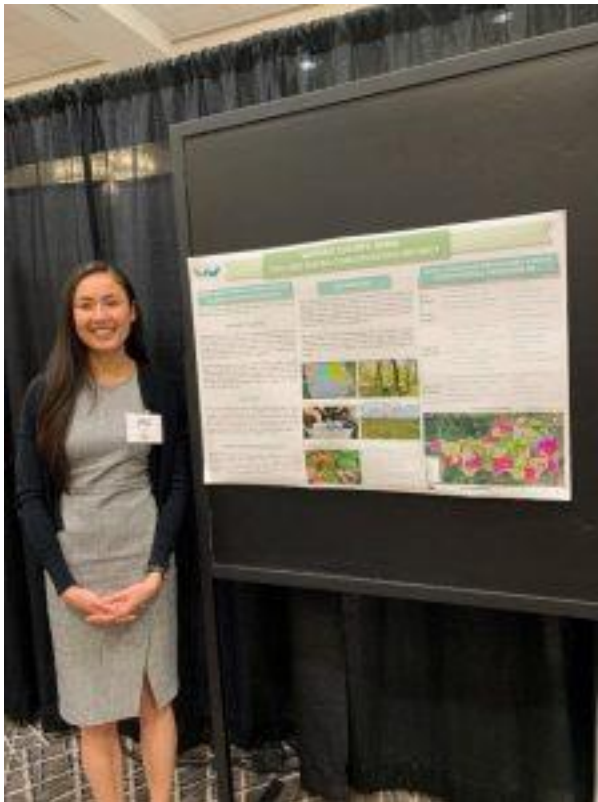
**“There have been many attacks on science, so we started a really positive fun event to promote science literacy ... Great to have parents there to take young people around and see what kinds of opportunities are available to them.”**

**– Ruth Henderson, Science Iowa.**

*Representing Warren SWCD at NACD Annual Meeting*

## NACD Annual Meeting TA Grant Participant: Grace Yi

*This blog post is part of a nine-part series highlighting technical assistance (TA) grant recipient participation at NACD's 76th Annual Meeting in Orlando, FL. This post's author, Grace Yi of Warren Soil & Water Conservation District in Iowa, attended the meeting with a TA stipend.*



Grace Yi, Technical Assistant (TA) Grant Recipient

Thanks to a newly launched Annual Meeting Scholarship Program, I had an amazing opportunity to attend the 2022 NACD Annual Meeting and represent **Warren Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)**. To be honest, the possibility of a brief respite from blistering Iowa winter didn't escape my mind when I applied for the scholarship. While Florida sunshine was wonderfully restorative, the best part of this trip was connecting with other TA grantees. As a sole employee of Warren SWCD – made possible by NACD TA Grants – it was extremely valuable to talk with other district employees, bouncing off ideas, and exchanging information.

Our conversations highlighted that despite varying climates, flora and fauna, and crop types, districts across the country face similar challenges such as lack of steady funding, staffing, and public awareness/appreciation of conservation districts. The last piece was particularly evident with the shocking news of Florida's Senate Bill 1078 and House Bill 783 proposing to abolish all soil and water conservation districts in the state. This was especially disheartening given that another common thread was how essential districts are to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and state agencies to accomplish conservation goals.

While these challenges are real, so are the creativity, dedication, and hopefulness of the success stories shared at small breakout sessions. I appreciated the wide range of topics offered, and especially enjoyed "On-Farm Conservation Tools," which demonstrated benefits of conservation in measurable outcomes such as increased profits or percent organic matter and provided tangible formulas to replicate it back home. I also enjoyed and learned a great deal from sessions where farmers or district staff talked about the projects they took on, why and how they did them, what worked, and what didn't work. Finally, the First Timers Session and NACD Region Meetings helped me to better understand NACD's structure and goals.

All in all, I'm very grateful for the opportunity to attend the annual meeting, and I return inspired and equipped with a new support system and ideas for Warren SWCD.

*(Reprinted from [article that first appeared on the NACD website](#) on August 5, 2022. Tags: [TA Annual Meeting Series](#))*



# FENCING & GRAZING CLINICS

**September 7, 2022**  
**ISU Armstrong Research Farm**  
**53020 Hitchcock Ave**  
**Lewis, IA | 9 am - 4 pm**

**September 12, 2022**  
**ISU McNay Research Farm**  
**45249 170th Ave**  
**Chariton, IA | 9 am - 4 pm**

**September 14, 2022**  
**Hansen Ag Student Center**  
**2508 Mortensen Rd**  
**Ames, IA | 9 am - 4 pm**

*Hosted by:*

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
Extension and Outreach  
**Iowa Beef Center**

## Topics

- New Tools in Fencing
- Building your Paddocks
- Grazing Leases & Contracts
- Water Quality: Test & Interpret
- Planning a Grazing Calendar
- Optional ISU Farm Tour

**Registration is required to attend. To register, contact:**

**Beth Reynolds | [bethr@iastate.edu](mailto:bethr@iastate.edu) or (307)761-3353**

**Erika Lundy-Woolfolk | [ellundy@iastate.edu](mailto:ellundy@iastate.edu) or (641)745-5902**

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