

---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.



June 2024
Volume 5, Number 9

CDI EXECUTIVE BOARD:

President: Jeri Thornsberry
Vice-President: Don Elsbernd
Treasurer: Jack Boyer
Secretary: Mary Ellen Miller
Past President: Ramona Nitz

CDI OFFICE STAFF:

Executive Director: Dien Judge
Program Manager: Carlee Sabus
Communications: Joe Hayes

Office Phone: 515-289-8300

Office Address:

Conservation Districts of Iowa
2015 Grand Ave. (Box #15)
Des Moines, IA. 50312

Website: <https://cdiowa.org>

From: President Jeri Thornsberry

Can you believe it's already July? In just about six weeks, we'll gather for our 78th Iowa Commissioners' Annual Conference at the Gateway in Ames, convening Sunday-Monday, August 18-19.

This year, our theme is *"Sowing Tomorrow's Harvest: Charting the Future of Soil and Water Conservation in Iowa."* This theme urges us to look forward and envision the future of conservation efforts in our state. It encourages a proactive approach, where we collaborate to innovate, sustain, and build resilience in Iowa's soil and water systems. Together, we can plant the seeds of progress and ensure a bountiful harvest of benefits for future generations.

You'll soon receive a preliminary conference agenda detailing our well-regarded speakers in the ballroom and at the breakout sessions, each reinforcing the theme through their presentations. (See page 7)

As part of our tradition, we'll also host a Silent Auction to support scholarships for the next generation of young students. Your generous donations will make a significant difference. Consider creating a basket of items from your district to contribute—every contribution counts towards our shared success.

Also, please note that the Iowa State Fair ends on Sunday, August 18th. If you're attending the fair, why not drive over to the Gateway and spend the night, and be ready for the conference the next morning?

Let's work together to make this conference impactful and inspiring. Looking forward to seeing you all soon!

**Save the date: 78th Iowa Commissioners' Annual Conference in Ames, August 18-19.
Reservation details coming soon!**

Executive Director Report – Dien Judge

The staff at CDI have been very busy planning and preparing for this year’s Annual Conference. You’ll read about those plans throughout this newsletter, but I would just like to emphasize how much we look forward to seeing you all at this year’s event. The Annual Conference is the one time each year when Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners can all join together to share ideas, learn from one another and make your voices heard through the Resolutions process. Please plan to attend and participate in this year’s conference.

I was privileged to attend the Summer Intern Orientation event this week hosted by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This event brought together a large group of young students who are serving as interns in various conservation offices around the state. They were joined by staff from IDALS, NRCS, the USDA Farm Service Agency and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to learn about these agencies and the work they do to preserve our land for the future generations. These young folks represent the future boots-on-the-ground in conservation, and that future looks bright. Special thanks to everyone who organized this event, as it served as a powerful reminder of the strength of our partnerships in Iowa.

Lastly, our thoughts have been on the unpredictable weather in Iowa. This spring and summer have been particularly challenging for folks, particularly in western Iowa.

From devastating tornadoes, to ruinous flooding, our hearts go out to everyone who is suffering losses from the storms.

Seek candidates for board member elections

North Central Region Conservation District Boards

NACD’s North Central Region (IL, IN, IA, MI, MO, MN, OH, and WI) will be holding elections for the NACD North Central Region Executive Board Member position at the NACD Summer Meeting in Boston, MA on August 11. This leadership position is available to anyone who is a local conservation district board member within our 8 states. The NACD Region board will be the electing body (1 vote per state).

Please [click here to review the job description](#) for this NACD leadership position, and if you are interested in running as a candidate for this position, you may send your letter of intent or a resume to Beth Mason (beth-mason@nacdn.org) by July 31. She will forward all submissions to the region board for their review and consideration prior to the meeting in Boston. This is a 2-year term with a maximum of 2 terms. If elected, the Executive Board member may be expected to attend meetings or training in December and just prior to the 2025 NACD Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, UT, February 8 – 12. However, the term officially starts immediately following the 2025 NACD Annual Meeting. You must be present at the Boston Summer Meeting on August 11 to be considered.

Madison SWCD ... Madison County Conservation Board

Creating collaborations – ‘Cultivating Connections’

Standing in a prairie stretch of land rich in native grasses on a private farm near Van Meter in early June, Kathleen Woida held up a freshly dug shovel of soil as the gathering of guests drew nearer. “This was poorer soil to start with,” she noted, breaking up the dirt. “But because of land management, the structure is much better now.” To author and scientist Kathleen Woida, a handful of worms in a ball of soil is Iowa gold. As Woida informed guests earlier during a presentation at the farm, “We need healthy soils now more than ever. Sixty percent of all species on earth are in the soil.” Formerly for 20 years a geologist with NRCS, Woida said Iowa has led the nation for soil erosion for 50 years and has “the most modified landscape in the country.”



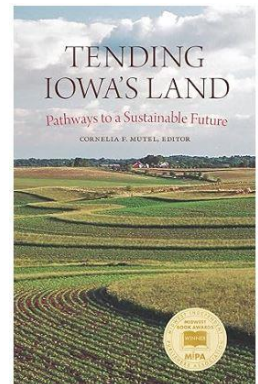
Kathleen Woida offering insights into healthy soil.



Soil scientist Kathleen Woida.

Because of her expertise as a soil scientist and as one of the essayists featured in the book *“Tending Iowa’s Land: Pathways to a Sustainable Future”*, a collective of Madison county conservation-focused groups asked Woida to take part in a unique four-part [“A Community Discussion”](#) series, now at its midway point on the calendar.

Yet this is one moment in time in a larger eventscape, originating from [Madison County Conservation Board](#) in a new effort to reach out, engage and collaborate with conservation-minded community groups, businesses, individuals: [“Cultivating Connections”](#). Madison SWCD Commissioner Tom Moss was on the prairie tour with Woida and nearly 40 others, there to hear part two of the series – “Soil” – the focus of Woida’s essay in the book that inspired the series.



“The book *Tending Iowa’s Land* was edited by Cornella F. Mutel and is a book of essays by experts in the field giving real life accounts and solutions to modern day conservation issues surrounding Life,

Soil, Water, and Air in Iowa,” explains Moss. “Partners of Madison County’s ‘Cultivating Connections’ chose to host a series of discussions covering each of the book’s topics.” The first of the four discussions featured Wildlife Specialist Dr. James Pease speaking about “Life”, held May in Winterset at Middle River Park. Pease authored the essay, “Survival Struggles, Survival Hope: Wildlife in Iowa” in *Tending Iowa’s Land*.



Dr. James Pease

For Jessie Lowry, the four-part discussion series is a successful early



Exploring natural wildlife surroundings with Dr. Pease near Winterset.

launch of what is expected to be much more ahead in county-wide collaborations. Lowry is Madison County Conservation Board Outreach Marketing Coordinator. “When I started at Madison County Conservation, I could see we’re doing all of this amazing work. And all these other entities in Madison County are doing amazing work! But it’s a little disjointed, and the entities aren’t communicating.”

Continued next page

CONNECTIONS



Outreach Marketing Coordinator Jessie Lowry leads the 'Soil' discussion group into the fields.

Lowry reached out to a contact from her previous work at Blank Park Zoo – where she led a collaboration to create a popular conservation program called “[Plant Grow Fly](#)” – who is now on Madison Conservation’s “Friends Board”, Keith Summerville. An environmental science professor at Drake University, Somerville had helped Lowry secure a dedicated intern to assist with “Plant Grow Fly”, and now was willing to do the same to help launch Cultivating Connections. Funding was secured from the [Jay N. Darling Institute](#). That caught the attention of district commissioner Moss.

“I’m on the planning committee for our district commission and we were also at the same time going through reviewing our 5-year plan, reviewing what we did in the last year,” says Moss. And one of the things that we touched on was ‘What can we do in our community to be better seen, better heard, to reach out? That tied together into, ‘How do we reach out into our community and become more involved?’ That was when I sat down with the folks at Madison County Conservation Board and discussed what specifically we can do as a group that can prevent both of us from doubling up on work. Jessie Lowry said they were working on a project that they wanted to do, a program called ‘Cultivating Connections.’”

“One major mission is to create this collaboration of local entities,” Lowry says. “And I’m talking about conservation professionals and agencies, but also small farms, and community aid organizations. Because the mission of Cultivating Connections is to cultivate connections in nature and to each other. No matter if it’s the conservation world or any other industry, there’s siloing, and people set in their ways. We need conversations to break down those silos.”

At that first meeting between Moss from [Madison SWCD](#) and Lowry from Madison County Conservation, Moss says they talked about “What is your ‘why’? Why do you want to be involved with Cultivating Connections and what does that mean to you? What are a few actions that you can do in your small space to make our bigger space together a better place to be? And then it asked each of us to make a pledge. Well, our pledge as a district was to be part of Cultivating Connections and interact with the community in a broader sense.”

One of the first major collaborations: the “Community Discussion” series, based on *Tending Iowa’s Land*. After the “Life” event in May with James Pease, and “Soil” in June that featured Woida, author of the book *Iowa’s Remarkable Soils*, the “Water” discussion will be led by Molly Hanson, former executive director of Iowa Rivers Revival in August, and “Air” to follow (date and presenter TBD). Co-sponsors of the series also includes a number of Madison County entities – in the spirit of conservation collaboration – including Madison County Foundation for Environmental Education (MCFEE), For Lands Sake, Winterset Public Library, Brick Road Books, and more.

Even as the discussion series continues, further collaborations are underway, says Commissioner Moss. “These partnerships that we’re building, whether they be with the corner cafe that’s supplying cookies or whether it be with something as large as Madison County Conservation Board, they are all important. Each of these groups bring their own people into the overall picture, and we as the Soil & Water Conservation District do not necessarily have outreach in all those people’s spaces. By having these partnerships and doing these events together, we’re all pulling each other’s people into a circle that all interconnects to build a stronger community conservation community amongst in our county.” Look for more to come, he says. “We plan on this being a long-term partnership that continues to have events. I foresee, with the core group of people that we have currently working on Cultivating Connections in Madison County, that there may never be another event that we specifically as a Soil & Water Conservation District have to do 100% by ourselves.”



Reviewing plans for the day at the May ‘Life’ event.

Summer Tour 2024

Exploring local conservation programs, projects



At ISU Northwest Research Farm near Sutherland, viewing and discussing ISU bioreactor project. (L-R) ISU farm superintendent Andrew Weaver, Dr. Matt Helmers ISU, CDI Director Pete Hobson, Ag Specialist Landon Lenhart. The bioreactor is 20' wide x 100' long x 4' deep and filled with carbon-rich wood chips that serve as a substrate for bacteria that breaks down nitrate.



Plant Operator Todd VandeKop reviews Lyon & Sioux Rural Water treatment plant processes with CDI President Jeri Thornsberry and CDI Region 2 Director Perry Black.



Discussing the Sioux Center Wet Pond urban conservation structure project. The detention pond holds excess water, improves water quality and provides a community amenity.

The annual State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee (SSCWQC), in partnership with CDI, held their annual "Conservation Summer Tour" on June 10th in Northwest Iowa. The tour viewed local conservation efforts. Tour stops included: The Northwest Research and Demonstration Farm near Sutherland, focusing on early bioreactor research successes; in Rock Rapids, the Lyon & Sioux RWS tests for more than 76 constituents to maintain quality water for communities; the Sioux Center Wet Pond detention basin slows and cleans water before it reaches the local creek, a project the Iowa Department of Natural Resources had contributed funds toward which also offers the city a local recreation area.

78th Iowa Commissioner's Annual Conference Silent Auction, August 19

The CDI Scholarship Program is funded by your donations, including for the annual conference "Silent Auction". Will you contribute this year?

What to donate to this year's Auction? Here's some starter ideas!

- Products specific to your county or region make great auction items!
- Compile a basket of local goods. Local wines, beers, honey and other items go over great!
- Consider bringing a craft from a local artisan, for example, a wildlife painting, bird house, yard art or quilt.
- Request a donation of an agricultural or conservation product or service from your local co-op or other agribusiness such as corn, bean, cover crop or native grass and forb seed, equipment rental, etc.
- Go green...or red! John Deere, Case, and other branded items, new or old, are always a hit!
- Promote the great outdoors with your donation! Ask a local store to donate hunting or fishing gear for the auction.
- Show your school pride by donating Cyclone, Hawkeye or your favorite team's gear and items!



"Please donate some wonderful, intriguing, interesting, unusual items for our Annual Silent Auction. It is so much fun to watch the bids increase as time passes. Let's help our young people interested in conservation. We need the next generation really engaged. Donate an item or more and help supplement our Scholarship Fund!"

CDI President Jeri Thornsberry

IAWA launches guide to compare Iowa cover crop payment programs

Special from Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance (IAWA)

By stacking incentives, some farmers could get paid \$100 or more per acre for planting new cover crops, but it's not always easy to keep track of all the programs out there. A new tool is beginning to solve that problem. It's an Iowa-specific cost share guide that allows farmers to compare public and private program details for cover crops, no-till, and reduced-till - *all in one place*. The guide, located at costsharecompare.com, is a pilot project by the Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance (IAWA), a nonprofit formed by the Iowa soybean, pork, and corn associations. The pilot will eventually expand into an interactive tool.

"Our vision for the guide and its growth is to empower farmers and landowners to make the best decision for their unique farms," said IAWA Communications Director, Rebekah Jones, who led the creation of the guide. "We spent months interviewing farmer-facing staff and learned that highest rates are not always the most critical factor. Some farmers prioritize contract length or ease of signup, for example. Whatever is most important to them - this makes it easier to compare that information."

"This guide is built to support our partners' work – whether it's coaching farmers through first-time cover crop questions, helping with existing program signup or fundraising for new programs," said Jeff Lucas, IAWA Executive Director. There are millions of dollars and dozens of programs to offset costs of soil health practices, like the cost of cover crop seed or drone application. Program payments can also help mitigate the risk of yield drags. To view the guide, visit costsharecompare.com. In its current format, it is best viewed on a desktop.

Iowa Soil & Water Commissioners' 78th Annual Conference Agenda

Sunday, August 18, 2024

Noon Registration Table Opens
 3:00 pm CDI Board Meeting

Monday, August 19, 2024

8:00 am Registration and Credentials Tables Open
 Exhibits Open – Silent Auction Items Accepted

9:00 am Guest Tour Departs
 Welcome from CDI and SSCWQC
 Welcome from Secretary of Ag Mike Naig
 CDI Business Meeting

12:30 pm Lunch and Awards Presentation

1:30 pm Afternoon session – Presentation by Justin Glisan, State of Iowa Climatologist:
“Resiliency: Intersection of Water Quality, Soil Health & Changing Weather”

2:00 pm Ice Cream Social served by CDI Board – Break and Exhibits

3:00 pm Conservation Potpourri Moderated by Joe Hayes, CDI Communications Coordinator

1. *“Leveraging Partnerships to Drive Conservation Adoption—Iowa Soybean Association’s RCPPs”* presented by Ben Porepp, ISA Agronomist
2. *“Cattle and Working Lands RCPP in Northwest Iowa”* presented by Colton Barnes, Project Coordinator and John Nitz, NW Iowa Farmer
3. 5 Year Plans—Highlighting Four SWCDs: Cedar, East Pott, Sioux, Winneshiek
4. What’s on Commissioners’ Minds? Questions from commissioners—Open Discussion

4:30 pm Social Hour, Exhibits, Silent Auction

5:30 pm Awards Banquet – Speaker Mitchell Hora, Continuum AG:
“Embracing Regenerative Agriculture: Proactive Strategies”

Guest Tour
 Monday, August 19th
 9:00am-3:30pm

DETAILS PENDING!

Tuesday, August 20, 2024

7:00 am Breakfast Buffet – Discussion with specific Regional Directors

7:45 am Visit Exhibits

8:30 am Panel Discussion – Partners: IDALS, NRCS, FSA, IDNR

10:00 am *“Enriching Commissioner’s Knowledge: Legal Primer for Commissioners’ Roles & Responsibilities”* presented by Eric Dirth, State of Iowa Assistant Attorney General

11:00 am Concurrent Breakout Sessions

- Watershed Structures (PL 566)
- A Future Look at Ethanol Industry and What it Means to Iowa Farmers
- Lessons Learned Working with Underserved Urban Farmers and Gardeners

12:00 noon Lunch and District Awards

1:15 pm Annual Conference Wrap-up