

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 President's Report

By President Sean Dolan

February has been a month full of activity for CDI. We held our quarterly board meeting in the office on the 11th. I always appreciate the discussions we have at these meetings because they help me look at issues from different points of view and gain more clarity on the conservation issues in the state.

We also remembered past director and Polk county commissioner, Cindy Valin, who passed away unexpectedly in December. Her passion for improving Iowa's soil and water will long be remembered. The following day, we held Conservation Partnership Day at the Capitol. Jim Obradovich, our lobbyist, presented us with an update on pertinent legislation and we were introduced to the new state executive director for the Farm Service Agency, Starlyn Perdue. It was the week before Funnel Week at the Capitol, so legislators were busy attending committee and sub-committee meetings, but many stopped in the Rotunda and had short conversations with us. Although the turnout from commissioners was poor, I felt we got to have meaningful conversations with a good number of our Senators and Representatives.

The next week, vice president TC Loving, past president Jeri Thornsberry, executive director Dien Judge, and program coordinator, Regan Davis traveled to San Antonio to represent Iowa at the NACD annual conference. I have not heard any specifics yet, but I'm positive it was a great event. We are currently in the middle of Spring Regionals. On Wednesday, I attended the region 6 and 7 meetings. Updates were given by Dien Judge of CDI, Susan Kozak of IDALS, Jon Hubbert of NRCS, and Jennifer Kurth of IDNR. Commissioners had great conversations on a range of topics and some ideas for some great resolutions were discussed. I would like to thank the Conservation Assistants from Marshall and Poweshiek counties, Lindsay Wenner and Burgandy Frese for all of their extra effort in planning and hosting these meetings. **-Continued on Page 2**

--Continued from Page 1 They were a great success! Next week, we will wrap up the region meetings. I apologize for not being able to attend all of the meetings, but we made an effort to have someone from the executive board at all of them.

We will have another lobbying opportunity for you to attend at the end of March. Celebrate Iowa's Outdoors Day is planned for March 24 at the Capitol and CDI will be in attendance as well. The next day, Dien, TC, Clare Lindahl and I will be in D.C. to talk our members of Congress on your behalf. We have confirmed in-person meetings with 4 of the 6 members.

When I write to you again, the grass should be green and the trees will be budding out. I look forward to the smells of the biology in the soil waking from their winter slumber.

CDI Executive Director's Report

By Executive Director Dien Judge

The last few weeks have been a flurry of activity for CDI, starting with our annual Conservation Partnership Day event at the Iowa Capitol on Feb. 12. We joined together with our partners in conservation and filled the rotunda for a few hours to share our message about the importance of fully funding our state soil and water conservation programs. A few days after the event, it was off to San Antonio, Texas for the National Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting.

Iowa has a long tradition of being deeply involved with the NACD organization, and that tradition continues. Attendees from all around the country were present to learn from a long list of great presenters. We also heard from USDA-NRCS Chief Aubrey Bettencourt, as well as NRCS Chief of Staff Colton Buckley. Iowa was honored for being among the top ten states for dues-paying district membership in NACD, and we also learned about some top honors for Iowa in the NACD Poster Contest and Photo Contest (see below for an article about these awards).

The NACD annual conference is always a tremendous opportunity to learn from our colleagues in other parts of the country. The camaraderie is strong, especially among the states in our North Central Region, which includes our neighbors in Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio.

After returning from the NACD event, it was time to hit the road for our annual Spring Regionals meetings. These meetings provide a great place for commissioners to get together with folks from their own area of the state and share ideas and success stories. We've had some great conversations this week in Red Oak, Council Bluffs, Marshalltown, Brooklyn and Ottumwa. Next week we head to the northern areas of the state in Regions 1, 2, 3 and 4. I always look forward to Spring Regionals, as I truly enjoy traveling around the state (as long as the weather is OK) and seeing all of the SWCD folks in person. Putting together these events is an important role of our organization, and we want to organize events that bring people together to fulfill our mission. One thing that is not so favorable, however, is a continuing trend of dwindling participation in these events. We have noticed that fewer and fewer commissioners have been participating in CDI events. We want to reverse this trend, and we're asking for your input.

What can we do to increase involvement of commissioners in CDI events? Should we be making changes to our event schedule? Should we be doing more online events and fewer in-person events? Please don't hesitate to reach out at any time and let us know how we can improve our events to get more people involved.

For job opportunities with CDI, go to:

<https://cdiowa.org/who-we-are/job-openings/>

Spring Regionals in full swing

Meetings to be held in regions 1,2,3 and 4 next week

Regional meetings were held this week in the southern half of the state, as commissioners and partners joined together for discussions on important conservation issues. The first of the meetings was held on Tuesday this week, in Red Oak in Region 8. Meetings were also held in Council Bluffs in Region 8, Marshalltown in Region 6, Brooklyn in Region 7, and Ottumwa in Region 9.

CDI Spring Regionals 2026			
Region	SWCD Host Location	Proposed Date & Time*	Meeting location
1	Lyon	3/3/2025 (10:00 AM)	Frontier Bank, 301 First Ave., Rock Rapids
2	Emmet	3/3/2025 (4:00 PM)	Estherville Elks Lodge #528, 3665 IA-9, Estherville
3	Howard	3/4/2025 (10:00 AM)	Cresco Bank & Trust, 126 2nd Ave., Cresco
4	Fayette	3/4/2025 (4:00 PM)	West Union Event Center, 10201 Harding Rd., West Union

Regional meetings will continue next week with meetings in Rock Rapids in Region 1, Estherville in Region 2, Cresco in Region 3 and West Union in Region 4. Bring your ideas and questions to share with the group!

Envirothon registration extended

The deadline for Iowa high school teams to register to compete in Envirothon 2026 has been extended to March 6.

Conservation Districts of Iowa is organizing the Iowa Envirothon competition for Iowa youth, which is open to teams of high school youth from all around the state of Iowa. The registration link for the 2026 competition is live on the CDI website, www.cdiowa.org and teams can now register before the deadline of March 6, 2026.

Envirothon is an environmental and natural resources conservation problem-solving, leadership and academic competition for kids grades 9-12 or ages 14-19 across the United States, Canada, China and Singapore. The program incorporates STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) principles, hands-on learning and outdoor field experiences. Envirothon is a program of the National Conservation Foundation, and is operated in Iowa by CDI in partnership with the Iowa Conservation Education Coalition.

We hope you'll reach out to your local school district and encourage them to get involved in Envirothon.



CONSERVATION DISTRICTS OF IOWA

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Conservation Partnership Day held in the Capitol rotunda

Conservation Partnership Day was held on Feb. 12 at the Iowa Capitol, with a group Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners in attendance. Pictured at right, from left, CDI Treasurer Mike Phillips, Rep. Jason Gearhart, CDI Executive Director Dien Judge and CDI President Sean Dolan discussing potential pending legislation . Gearhart serves on both the House Agriculture and the House Natural Resources committees.



Pictured at left, CDI lobbyists from the Capitol Group, Jefferson Fink and Jim Obradovich, addressed the CDI group at a meeting before heading to the rotunda. Fink and Obradovich provided an update on pending legislation and the potential for any movement on CDI priorities.

Pictured at right, CDI Program Coordinator Regan Davis visits with CDI Vice President TC Loving at the CDI table during the event in the rotunda. CDI was joined by partner organizations including IDALS, NRCS, Iowa Learning Farm, Iowa Soybean Association, Iowa DNR, Iowa Conservation Education Coalition, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and Watershed Management Authorities.



How to become a Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioner

Do you know someone who is interested in becoming a Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioner? Do they need information about the process of getting their name on the ballot to run for the office this year? This information is available on the CDI website.

Please direct interested individuals to go to this link: <https://cdiowa.org/get-involved/become-a-soil-and-water-conservation-district-commissioner/>

For more information about the process to get elected to your local local Soil & Water Conservation Districts, navigate to the "Get Involved" tab on CDI's website!

World Wildlife Fund seeks participants in study

The World Wildlife Fund is organizing an effort to study the effects of neonicotinoids in commercial seed treatment for corn and soybeans on untargeted species.

The study will seek to answer what are the true consequences of neonicotinoids in commercial seed treatments, and whether they provide more benefits, agronomically and economically, than going without the treatments. WWF is looking for 8-10 field trials per year, for three years of corn and soybeans. Data to be collected include planting data such as date, variety/hybrid, population, IPM practices, tillage, harvest data, etc.

Those interested in learning more about the study may contact Heather at hrindler@blinc.com



District Commissioners discussing proposed resolutions for 2026

The 2026 Call for Resolutions was sent out to all Conservation Districts of Iowa offices on December 15.

The CDI Resolutions Process provides every member of Conservation Districts of Iowa the opportunity to make your voice heard by bringing issues and concerns to the attention of state and federal decision-makers.

Throughout the 2026 Resolutions Process, all resolutions will be properly reviewed by the broader conservation community before being submitted for action. This year, the deadline for submitting resolutions is Friday, March 27, 2026. Resolutions submitted after this deadline will not be considered for the 2026 cycle.

In prior years, some resolutions submitted could have been handled with conversations and/or negotiations with one of our partner agencies. CDI encourages districts to work with the appropriate agency first. If the district is not satisfied with the outcome of those discussions or negotiations, then submit the resolution for consideration. If multiple districts submit similar resolutions, CDI may combine them into one unified resolution. This strategy will strengthen the position of the districts and provide a clearer, more cohesive argument when presenting the resolution. We once again offer pre-conference resolution voting by mail for commissioners. The goal is to have all 500 commissioners from Iowa's 100 districts to participate in the voting process.

**Do you have a conservation
success story or an event to share?**

*Please send us your stories and we'll share them
with our members and partners!*

CDI Poster Contest rules and information released for 2026

The CDI Poster Contest is once again open to Iowa youth, from Kindergarten through 12th grade. Participants this year will make posters using the theme “Soil. Where it all Begins”.

The contest starts at the district level; winners advance to the state level, and then to the national level, where they receive recognition at NACD’s annual meeting. The poster contest is open to public, private and home-schooled students.

For complete rules and information about the Poster Contest, please visit the CDI website at <https://cdiowa.org/get-involved/poster-contest/>.

Iowa had a national winner in the 2024 contest with the poster made by Chen Gao of East Pottawattamie Soil and Water Conservation District.

CDI is seeking a new sponsor for our Poster Contest, so if you’re aware of a business or organization that would be interested in sponsoring the contest, please let us know!

Soil.
Where it all Begins



Tama SWCD hosting free soil health event on cover crop management

Join Tama Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) for its upcoming event, “From Seed to Strategy: Intentional Cover Crop Management.” It will be held on Thursday, March 26 at the Reinig Toledo Civic Center, 1007 S. Prospect Drive in Toledo, Iowa, 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. – **Continued on Page 7**

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From Seed to Strategy will feature several speakers focusing on intentional cover crop management, row crop seedling health and vigor following cover crops and stackable cover crop cost-share options to get the most out of every acre.

This free event includes a complimentary lunch, provided by Tama SWCD. Morning refreshments will be available at 8:30 a.m. An RSVP is required by March 18 by phoning 641-484-2702, ext. 305 or by emailing melody.bro@ia.nacdnet.net.

Barry Fisher retired after 39 years with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service. Most recently he was the Soil Health Division Central Region Leader where he and his team provided leadership, training and technical exchange on Soil Health Management Systems for NRCS, farmers, stakeholders and partners throughout the Corn Belt and Northern Plains. Since retirement, Barry has launched Fisher Soil Health LLC as the next step on his soil health and regenerative farming journey. He remains active with state and national training and initiatives which advance technologies for improving soil health and adoption of regenerative farming. Barry and his wife, Michael, practice soil health on their family's cash grain and livestock farm in West-Central Indiana. He has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Agriculture from Western Kentucky University and is a native of French Lick, Indiana.

Meaghan Anderson is an ISU Extension & Outreach field agronomist serving nine counties in central Iowa, including Tama County. Prior to serving in this role, she earned her M.S. and B.S. degrees in Crop Production and Physiology and Agronomy at Iowa State University. While a field of green cover crop can mean substantial environmental benefit, it is important to prioritize management to prevent detrimental effects on our cash crops. Meaghan will cover appropriate cover crop termination timing and strategies, successful establishment of the cash crop following a cover crop and key concerns to watch out for in order to successfully integrate cover crops into your cropping system.

The event's host and cost-share discussion facilitator will be Tama SWCD Assistant Commissioner Adam Nechanicky of rural Buckingham. With an engineering background, a diversity of on-farm enterprises and a strong desire to improve the health of his soil resources and the quality of water flowing from his farm, Adam has created a reputation for developing a systems-approach to solving resource problems by crafting innovative techniques to accomplish goals and solve problems. Adam and his family have been mentors of peers and professionals alike in water quality and soil health throughout East-Central Iowa and the state's Benton/Tama Nutrient Reduction Demonstration Project, which focused on water quality.

Please join Tama SWCD for this event and RSVP by March 18.



**Morning refreshments will be available at 8:30 a.m.
A complimentary lunch will be provided.
An RSVP is REQUIRED for this free event.
To RSVP, call 641-484-2702, ext. 305 or
email melody.bro@ia.nacdnet.net by Wednesday, March 18**

Iowa poster and photo entries win top prizes in national contests

A photo and a poster made by Iowa creators were honored with high level awards last week at the National Association of Conservation Districts' annual meeting.

Last week NACD announced the winners of the 2025 Photo and Poster Contests during the association's 80th Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas.

The photo contest, open to amateur photographers in both youth and adult divisions, attracted entries of images reflecting the themes of "Agriculture and Conservation Across America," "Close-Up Conservation," "Conservation in Action," and "Conservation Practices."

The poster contest, open to students from kindergarten through 12th grade, celebrated the 2025 NACD Stewardship Week theme, "Home is Where the Habitat Is."

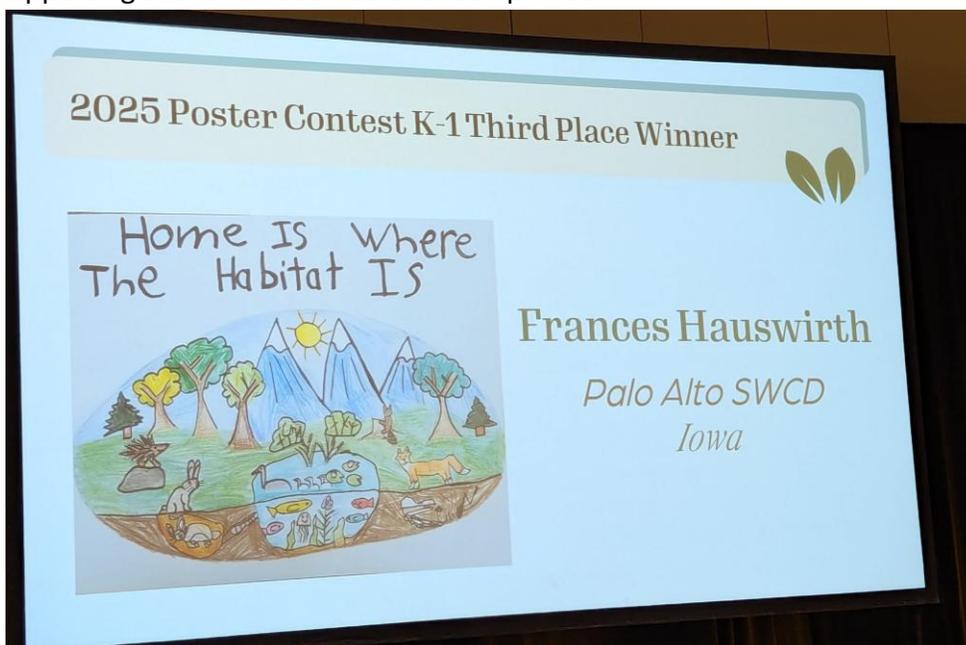
"This year's photos and

posters excellently capture this year's 'Home is Where the Habitat Is' theme," said NACD President Gary Blair.

"The 2025 contest winners exemplify the role habitats, from sprawling forests to urban parks, play in supporting the continued health of our planet."



Above, Janet Abrahamson of Appanoose County Soil and Water Conservation District won the top prize in the NACD photo contest in the Conservation Practices category.



The winners will receive cash prizes, and all contest participants will receive a certificate of participation. View all of the winning photos and posters on [NACD's Flickr page](#).

At left, Frances Hauswirth's award winning poster. This entry from Palo Alto SWCD in Iowa was the Third Place winner in the NACD national poster contest.

Join us for Celebrate Iowa's Outdoors Day at the Iowa Capitol

Conservation groups join together for a day on the hill

Conservation Districts of Iowa is joining together as a co-host with a large number of other conservation groups to organize the 2026 Celebrate Iowa's Outdoors Day on March 24 from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm.

Supporters of Iowa's outdoor natural resources will come to the capitol for interactive displays, speakers, and to connect with legislators for Celebrate Iowa's Outdoors Day. Iowa's parks, trails, wildlife, soil and water and all part of our quality of life and cause for celebration. Connect with legislators and meet other Iowans passionate about protecting spaces for outdoor recreation and caring for our natural resources.

For complete details about Celebrate Iowa's Outdoors Day, please go to this link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/celebrate-iowas-outdoors-day-2026-tickets-1980734473129?aff=odtdtcreator>

