

# 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

Greetings from the frozen tundra of Eastern Iowa! I feel like it has been a while since we have experienced an extended duration of low temperatures, but I have a tendency to block out painful memories! It would have been nice to keep some of the early snow we received to serve as insulation for the cover crops, alfalfa, and over-winter small grains that were seeded.

As a farmer, this time of year seems like meeting and farm show season. I enjoy attending these to gain more knowledge and network with others. CDI is joining in to offer some of these opportunities and I would like to invite and encourage you to attend.

We will begin with **Conservation Partnership Day**, which will be held on Thursday, February 12 in Des Moines at the State Capitol. We plan to begin in the Goldfinch Room at the State Historical Building at 9:30 AM where we will get an update on the current Iowa Legislature Session. Around 11:00, we'll go to the Capitol and gather in the rotunda where we can meet our legislators and advocate for funding and legislation which positively impacts the soil and waters of our great state.

The saying, "There is power in numbers" is true and we would quickly get the attention of all Senators and Representatives if 500 SWCD commissioners were standing in the rotunda, waiting to talk to them! You will soon be receiving a packet for the day which will include a sample letter to send to your legislators, giving them a heads up that you will be there and would like to have a conservation. It has been my experience that the letters do help, and make it easier to get in front them.

The next opportunities are the **Spring Regionals** which will fire up in the last week of February. These meetings are integral to how CDI functions because information is shared back and forth from the districts to not only CDI, but also IDALS, NRCS and IDNR staff. Elections for Regional directors will also be held in Region 1, -- **Continued on Page 2**

--Continued from Page 1 Region 4, and Region 7. Through the director position, I have met some truly wonderful people who are serving or served in the past on this board. They have enriched my life, and I am positive they would yours as well.

Once again, I urge you to check out CDI's website. The calendar page is a great resource, and we welcome everyone to submit district events and field days to CDI and we will get them on the calendar. Vice president TC Loving, from Humboldt County, has done a great job on the site and she envisions the calendar being a clearing house for all conservation events that happen in Iowa.

If you get a chance, check out Gabe Brown's book "From Dirt to Soil." It is an easy read, and I have found many insights that I can apply to my operation going forward.

I hope to see you in Des Moines on the 12<sup>th</sup>! -- Sean

## CDI Executive Director's Report

By Executive Director Dien Judge

It seems like it was just New Year's Day, it's amazing that January is already coming to a close. That means the Iowa Legislative Session is kicking into high gear and there's lots of discussion about important topics at the Iowa Capitol. Please take a look at the CDI Legislative Updates that we send out to commissioners. We will send these updates out every week during the legislative session by sending them directly to commissioners' email addresses. If we don't have your email address, please contact me and we'll get you added to our distribution list.

As members of Conservation Districts of Iowa, our organization works to share your voice at the Iowa Capitol. Your CDI Resolutions, voted on and approved by your organization's members, represent the ideas and values of Soil & Water Conservation Commissioners from every corner of the state. We share these resolutions with Iowa Legislators, to educate them on these important topics and influence them to make the right decisions. As a part of these efforts, CDI employs a professional lobbyist firm: The Capitol Group. This firm has years of experience in working with the Iowa Legislature and has a great record of results.

If you ever have any issues or concerns that you'd like to share about pending legislation, please don't hesitate to reach out to me and let me know. We'll try to address any questions or concerns as best we can.

We'll take these ideas and concerns to the Iowa Legislature as a group on February 12 during Conservation Partnership Day. Please plan to attend, it's very important for us to have a big group of commissioners in attendance.

Almost immediately after the Conservation Partnership Day ends, we'll be preparing to travel to San Antonio, Texas, for the annual conference of the National Association of Conservation Districts. Our Iowa delegation will represent you at this national conference, which brings conservation leaders together from all around the country. Important decisions are made regarding national policy priorities, as well as wonderful opportunities to learn from our colleagues from all of the diverse areas of our great nation.

And then it's back on the road in Iowa for our annual Spring Regionals meetings. I always enjoy traveling around the state to come and meet with you all in your own areas, and Spring Regionals is one of our best opportunities all year to meet and learn from one another. Let's hope for good weather (it's always unpredictable in February and March in Iowa)!

**For job opportunities with CDI, go to:**

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



# Make your voice heard: Conservation Partnership Day

## *Plan to attend Thursday, Feb. 12 in the Capitol Rotunda*

Mark your calendars and plan to attend the 2026 Conservation Partnership Day, to be held on Thursday, Feb. 12, 2026 at the Iowa Capitol.

Conservation Districts of Iowa is once again organizing the event, bringing Iowa's leading soil and water conservation organizations together in Des Moines to meet with Iowa legislators.

All Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners are invited to attend.

The day will begin with a meeting of SWCD commissioners and our partners at the **State Historical Building at 9:30 AM in the Goldfinch Room**. Members will be provided with an update on the Iowa Legislative Session from CDI lobbyist Jim Obradovich, and will be able to ask questions of staff from the Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship and the USDA-NRCS.

Following the meeting at the State Historical Building, commissioners and partners will go to the Iowa Capitol and gather in the rotunda with our partner organizations to visit with legislators.

It's important to have a large group of commissioners in attendance, so please plan to participate!

# IDALS urban conservation program project leads to historical discovery

Thanks to an urban conservation grant from the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and support from local sources, the City of Des Moines recently completed a wet pond rehabilitation project in Glendale Cemetery, located in central Des Moines.

In the spring of 2023, the Department awarded the City of Des Moines a \$250,000 urban water quality cost-share grant, utilizing funding from the state's Water Quality Initiative (WQI) and Conservation Infrastructure Program (CIP). The grant helped leverage a total of \$1 million from the city and local sources to complete the project. Rehabilitation work was completed in August 2024 with vegetation established in 2025.



*Glendale Cemetery Pond, Des Moines*

Glendale Cemetery Pond is located at the headwaters of Waveland Creek Watershed, which flows into Walnut Creek, and, eventually, the Raccoon River. Prior to the rehabilitation project, the 2-acre pond, which receives urban runoff from approximately 122 acres, suffered from extensive shoreline erosion and sedimentation.

The rehabilitation process included draining water and removing sediment, which increased the pond's storage capacity, reduced peak runoff rates and reduced erosion downstream. To further reduce erosion and sedimentation, a modified outlet structure was installed to control the flow of water released following storm events and the pond banks were re-shaped. Finally, native vegetation was planted to provide additional stabilization to the banks of the pond, deter unwanted waterfowl, provide food for pollinators and add to the public's enjoyment.

The cemetery pond was originally constructed in 1939. After the water was drained and during the excavation of the sediment, a wooden wagon wheel was found at the base of the pond. Excavation of the pond was briefly stopped to allow the City of Des Moines to do a further review prior to proceeding. The City of Des Moines reviewed pictures in their archives taken by a Works Progress Administration photographer circa 1939. Pictures included the wagon the City of Des Moines suspected the wheel found in the pond at Glendale Cemetery came from.

The wagon was used during earthwork in Grandview Park. The archives contained photos of the WPA-era dredging of the MacRae Park pond by – **Continued on Page 5**

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the same work team photographed with the wagons. This team also built the pond at Glendale Cemetery. The assumption is made that the wheel was damaged during the work at the cemetery and discarded in the pond during the project.

Congratulations to the City of Des Moines for completing this significant water quality project. The pond in Glendale Cemetery will continue to be enjoyed by thousands of visitors, offering a beautiful and tranquil place for remembrance and reflection.

For more information regarding the Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship's urban conservation program, visit <https://www.cleanwateriowa.org/urban-demonstration-projects>



*An old wooden wagon wheel was discovered at the base of Glendale Cemetery Pond after the pond was drained for an urban conservation project. The City of Des Moines reviewed pictures in their archives taken by a Works Progress Administration photographer circa 1939. Pictures included the wagon the City of Des Moines suspected the wheel found in the pond at Glendale Cemetery came from.*

**Do you have a conservation  
success story to share?**

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

# Spring Regionals an opportunity to share ideas



Host districts, dates announced for annual regional meetings

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
5	West Pott.	2/24/2025 (4:00 PM)	Pottawattamie County Roads Operation Center, 17501 Eastern Hills Dr., Council Bluffs
6	Marshall	2/25/2025 (10:00 AM)	Grimes Farm and Conservation Center, 2349 233rd St., Marshalltown
7	Poweshiek	2/25/2025 (4:00 PM)	Ruritan Club, 3820 175th St., Brooklyn
8	Montgomery	2/24/2025 (10:00 AM)	Elks Lodge, 519 N. 1st St., Red Oak
9	Wapello	2/26/2025 (10:00 AM)	Izaak Walton League, 11077 90th Street, Ottumwa

Conservation Districts of Iowa has announced the schedule for 2026 Spring Regionals, so please mark your calendars and save the date of your Spring Regional Meeting. Locations for the meetings have now been set.

The first regional meetings will be held the last week of February, beginning with **Region 8** on Tuesday, February 24, hosted by Montgomery SWCD at 10:00 AM, followed by the **Region 5** meeting hosted by West Pottawattamie SWCD at 4:00 PM. On Wednesday, February 25, Marshall SWCD will host the **Region 6** regional meeting in the morning at 10:00 AM, and Poweshiek SWCD will host the **Region 7** meeting at 4:00 PM. The **Region 9** meeting will be held on Thursday, February 26 at 10:00 AM hosted by Wapello SWCD. –Continued on Page 7

--Continued from Page 6 The following week will kick off with the **Region 1** meeting hosted by Lyon SWCD on Tuesday, March 3 at 10:00 AM. Emmet SWCD will host the **Region 2** meeting later that day at 4:00 PM.

Howard SWCD will host the **Region 3** meeting on Wednesday, March 4 at 10:00 AM, and we wrap up the Spring Regionals with the final meeting in **Region 4**, later that day, hosted by Fayette SWCD at 4:00 PM.

CDI extends our sincere thanks to the IDALS Conservation Assistants in each of the host districts, who help organize these meetings.

## ***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.



# CDI Poster Contest rules and information released for 2026

The CDI Poster Contest is once again open to Iowa youth, from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> 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



## ***CDI Scholarships announced for 2026***

CDI, in partnership with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, is proud to support the higher education of Iowa students who are passionate about conservation and agriculture.

Information, rules and application materials have been posted on CDI’s website at <https://cdiowa.org/get-involved/scholarships/>.

High school seniors graduating in Iowa’s Class of 2026 who plan to pursue a program of study in any field related to conservation or agriculture are eligible to apply for the CDI Conservation Scholarship. While a wide range of studies qualify, preference will be given to students pursuing degrees directly related to conservation and/or agriculture. Scholarship funds must be used toward the recipient’s first year of college education.

### **2026 Application & Instructions**

Please note: **The 2026 scholarship application form has been updated.**

Previous versions will **not** be accepted.

Applicants should read and follow all instructions carefully, as incomplete or incorrectly filled-out applications will be disqualified. Pay close attention to submission deadlines—late applications will not be considered.

The official application form is available at: <http://www.cdiowa.org/>

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**Application Process & Deadlines**

- **Friday, February 6, 2026:** Applicants must submit completed applications to their county SWCD office (based on county of residence). To find your local office, visit the [USDA Service Center Locator](#) and select your county on the map.
- **Friday, March 13, 2026:** Each SWCD selects one county winner to forward to their CDI Regional Director.
- **Friday, March 27, 2026:** The Regional Director selects one regional winner to advance to the state-level competition.
- **Friday, April 3, 2026:** A panel of CDI Officers and members of the CDI Scholarship Committee reviews regional finalists and selects state winners.
- **Friday, May 1, 2026:** CDI notifies local SWCD offices of the winning applicants. Local offices will then contact the student, their school, and local media with results.

**No applications will be considered if submitted after these deadlines.**

# ***Envirothon provides Iowa youth with a unique learning experience***

Conservation Districts of Iowa is preparing once again for the Iowa Envirothon competition for Iowa youth. This year’s competition will be held in the spring of 2026, and will be open to high school youth from all around the state of Iowa.

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.

The registration link for the 2026 competition is now live on the CDI website, [www.cdiowa.org](http://www.cdiowa.org) and teams can register before the deadline of Feb. 26, 2026.

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

