

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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President's Report

By Sean Dolan

"April showers bring May flowers." If that adage holds true, folks around me in East Central Iowa should have arrangements on their countertops all month long! Unfortunately, the rain came in downpours and storms, not showers. Many soybean stubble fields really took it on the chin.

A feeling of sadness and frustration comes over me when I survey those fields. Soil, which took many centuries to build, was lost forever in a matter of hours. I'm scared to think about all the nitrates that got flushed out of the soils with the precipitation. Months like April demonstrate to us why our positions as commissioners are so crucial. In my mind, our responsibility is to educate and demonstrate effective practices to producers to make meaningful progress. We try to aggregate knowledge, so the effort is easier for our friends and neighbors. It takes passion and steadfastness to make progress

We do this so future generations will be able to reap the benefits of these rich resources.

Iowa's NRCS State Conservationist, Jon Hubbert, is retiring at the end of April. If you have ever been to a Spring Regional or the annual meeting, you have heard him speak. He has been a great ally and friend of CDI and will be missed. I wish Jon the best as he enjoys his retirement.

I am going to leave you with a few pictures of what is going on in some of my fields. Have a great and safe May.

Sean

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Rye in back was seeded September 28 and is knee high. Rye in the foreground was seeded November 1 and is 4 inches tall. Seeding date has a massive influence on spring biomass accumulation and you can use that to your advantage either way depending on your agronomic goals.



We are no-tilling soybeans into this field today. It will be a relay research field done in conjunction with Northeast Iowa RC&D, the American Flood Coalition, and Iowa State University.



Last year's oat stubble was seeded to a multi-species CC and grazed last fall. The triticale, hairy vetch, and crimson clover overwintered well and legumes should already be producing nitrogen.

Soil. Where It All Begins

Soil and Water Conservation Week continues in Iowa through May 3

Every year, SWCDs across the country celebrate Stewardship Week as a way to promote natural resource conservation. This year in Iowa, Soil and Water Conservation Week begins April 26th and runs through May 3rd. The theme for this year is “Soil. Where it all Begins”.

This year, Iowa celebrates its 85th Soil and Water Conservation Week, building on a long legacy of stewardship throughout the state of Iowa.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts were established in the U.S. after the devastating years of the “Dust Bowl” in an effort to ensure sustainable agriculture and clean water. Following the formation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Iowa, our state association was formed, originally named the “Iowa Association of Soil Conservation District Commissioners,” now doing business as Conservation Districts of Iowa.

We hope you take a moment to reflect on our organization’s official mission statement this week: “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.”



SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION WEEK

April 26 – May 3, 2026

Executive Director’s Report

By Dien Judge

Soil and Water Conservation Week is one of our best opportunities to highlight all of the crucial work that is being done to preserve and protect our precious soil and our crucial water resources. For the last 85 years (think about that, 85 years is a long time!), Iowans have taken this one week out of the year to make an extra effort to talk to their friends and neighbors about the importance of conservation.

Our natural resources in Iowa are a valuable legacy that we need to protect for future generations. I hope you’ve taken some time this week to tell your story in your local district. If you did not do so this week, please think about how you can make this effort throughout the rest of the year.

One of the highlights of Soil and Water Conservation Week every year is the Iowa Envirothon state competition. This year the event was held once again at Jester Park, and we had some tremendous Iowa youth participate. These kids are our future leaders in conservation, and we have a lot to be proud of here in Iowa. We wish the winning team from Decorah the best of luck in the International competition in Mississippi.

We had more than 50 teams from all around the state compete in Envirothon this year, but that is not enough. We’d like to see more teams from more schools get involved. Please take a moment to contact your local school district and ask them to look into participating in Envirothon in the future. It’s a great program that is supported by the National Conservation Foundation.

We hope you’ll encourage folks to organize a local team for next year’s competition!

Decorah ‘Naturally Selected’ team wins Iowa Envirothon

Decorah’s “Naturally Selected” team won the top honors at the Iowa Envirothon state competition this week. The state competition was held on Monday, April 27 at Jester Park Nature Center and Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center in Polk County.

The state competition brought together the top 15 teams from all around the state of Iowa following the regional competition held in March. To qualify for the state competition, teams of high school students competed in online testing in the fields of aquatic ecology, forestry and prairie, soil and land use, and wildlife.

The Decorah team is now eligible to represent Iowa in the International Envirothon competition, this year to be held in Mississippi in July.

Here are the results of the state competition:

2026 Iowa Envirothon State Competition Results-

1. Decorah - Naturally Selected
2. Decorah - Sahur Society
3. Muscatine – Muskie Senior Plus
4. North Fayette Valley – Dirt Bags

2026 Iowa FFA Top Two Teams-

1. Muscatine – Muskie Senior Plus
2. Beckman Catholic – Beckman Catholic FFA

A total of 51 Envirothon teams of high school students participated in Iowa Envirothon this year.

Conservation Districts of Iowa is the main organizer for the Iowa Envirothon competition for Iowa youth, which is open to teams of high school youth from all around the state of Iowa. If your school is not involved in Envirothon, please let them know that we would like to help them get involved in the future. 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. --Continued on Page 5

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The Decorah Naturally Selected team was the top winner at the Iowa Envirothon State Competition on Monday this week at Jester Park in Polk County. The team is eligible to represent Iowa in the International Envirothon competition later this year in Mississippi. Pictured are, from left, Atticus Raabe, Thatcher Brown, Jack Hammell, Thomas Davis, Oskar Swanson.

The Decorah Sahur Society team took second place at the Iowa Envirothon competition. Pictured are, from left, Riley Berns, Oliver Bollinger, Kyle Pattison, Reid Bers, Carson Bohner.



CONNECTIONS



Muscatine's Muskie Senior Plus team took third place and was also the top FFA team at the Iowa Envirothon event.

A special thank-you goes out to all of the volunteers who assisted with the Iowa Envirothon competition this year. This event takes a lot of work to pull off each year, and we are very grateful for the assistance from our volunteers.

We also would like to thank our gracious sponsors for the event this year. We need financial support to make this event happen, and we appreciate the help.



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CDI Scholarship Committee announces 2026 CDI scholars

Conservation Districts of Iowa’s Scholarship Committee met in early April to review the regional scholarship nominations for 2026, with a total of \$9,000 in scholarships to be awarded.

Valia Batdorf, of Bettendorf, was named the winner of the top scholarship of \$3,000 for 2026. Valia’s nomination forms were very impressive, amidst a group of other very impressive nominees.

“During my many years on this committee, I’ve never seen applications as amazing as those from the top two!” said longtime Scholarship Committee member Ramona Nitz. “Thank you to all of the regional directors who forwarded all of the regional winning applications to us. Let’s continue to encourage districts to participate in this project by sponsoring their own scholarships and contributing to our CDI scholarship fund. Great students out there who deserve the best!”

Lily Moeller, of Orange City, will take the second prize scholarship of \$2,000, and Cole Kastner, of Kiron, will take the third place scholarship of \$1,000. The six other regional scholarship winners will each receive a scholarship award in the amount of \$500.

2026 CDI STATE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

PLACEMENT	REGION	DISTRICT, CITY	NAME	AWARD
1	7	Scott SWCD, Bettendorf	Valla Batdorf	\$3,000
2	1	Sioux SWCD, Orange City	Lily Moeller	\$2,000
3	5	Crawford SWCD, Kiron	Cole Kastner	\$1,000

2026 CDI REGIONAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

REGION	DISTRICT, CITY	NAME	AWARD
2	Sac SWCD, Lake View	Tucker Freese	\$500
3	Chickasaw SWCD, Lawler	Bree Balk	\$500
4	Fayette SWCD, Maynard	Mae Weidemeier	\$500
6	Boone SWCD, Boone	Henderson Gustafson	\$500
8	Adams SWCD, Corning	Cael Hogan	\$500
9	Davis SWCD, Bloomfield	Culee Smith	\$500

CDI raises funds throughout the year to cover the costs of the scholarship. One of the main sources of funding comes from the silent auction held each year at the CDI Annual Conference. Soil and Water Conservation Districts can donate items for the silent auction any time of year, and individuals are welcome to make tax-deductible contributions to the CDI Scholarship Fund.

To donate to the scholarship program, please send checks to:

**Conservation Districts of Iowa
Scholarship Fund
2015 Grand Ave. Box 15
Des Moines, IA 50312**

Newly elected officials in Iowa are now required to take public information training

Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners are included in this mandate

Iowa law (Iowa Code § 21.12) requires newly elected or appointed public officials to complete mandatory training on Open Meetings and Public Records (Chapters 21 & 22) within 90 days of taking the oath or assuming office. The 1–2 hour training covers meeting notices, closed sessions, and records requests, with certificates issued upon completion.

Key Requirements

- Who: Newly elected or appointed members of governmental bodies, including school boards, community colleges, and local officials.
- When: Within 90 days of taking the oath of office or assuming duties.
- Content: The training must cover Iowa Code Chapter 21 (Open Meetings) and Chapter 22 (Public Records), including,,:
 - Proper notice and agenda posting.
 - Rules for closed sessions.
 - Handling public record requests.
 - Penalties for non-compliance.
- Documentation: A certificate of completion must be retained by the government body.

Approved Training Providers

The [Iowa Public Information Board \(IPIB\)](#) oversees the training requirements. Approved training options include:

- Iowa League of Cities: Offers online and in-person sessions.
- AEA Learning Online: Specialized modules for school board members.
- State Library of Iowa: Provides the "Open Meetings, Open Records: Compliance is the Law" course via Workday Learning.
- Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach: Offers workshops for local officials.

For more specific information on authorized training, visit the [IPIB Training Page](#).

**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!*

Wayne SWCD celebrates 42nd year of gifting trees to third graders

The Wayne County Soil and Water Conservation District celebrated their 42nd Anniversary of gifting trees to the third-grade classes in Wayne County including Corydon, Morman Trail, and Seymour Schools. The Wayne SWCD will continue to carry on this tradition in honor of late commissioner, Hubert Staggs, who has delivered the tree's to third graders for 41 years.



Pictured is Wayne SWCD Commissioner, Justin Hopkins, presenting trees to third graders at Wayne Elementary School.

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!

INHF works to promote IWiLL

The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation is working on a project to promote Iowa’s Water and Land Legacy, a 2010 voter-approved state constitutional amendment establishing a dedicated trust fund for natural resources, soil conservation, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation in Iowa. CDI has a standing resolution in support of funding the trust fund.

Grant Young, INHF advocacy coordinator, will be speaking on a Zoom meeting on Wednesday, May 27 at 9:00 AM at noon. If you are interested in receiving the invitation and wish to join the meeting, please send an email to dien@cdiowa.org.

The event will provide education as well as a space for people to ask questions or give any comments or concerns about the program.

Anyone interested in learning more about the IWill effort is encouraged to sign up at the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/IWILLsignup>

