

---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



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CDI EXECUTIVE BOARD:

President: Sean Dolan
Vice-President: T.C. Loving
Treasurer: Mike Phillips
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President's Report

By Sean Dolan

The day length and calendar indicate summer quickly coming to an end which, to me, seems unfathomable. It's hard to believe kids are already back in school, and choppers are starting to make corn silage in parts of the state. On our farm this week, we will be flying some cover crops on a couple of fields which will be grazed this fall and winter. I also have a good amount of rye and oats to clean, but I have been waiting for the germination test to come back before I start.

Last week was CDI's 80th Annual Conference. Overall, I felt the conference was great and I was pleased with how it turned out. I know I pumped up the speaker line-up last month, but they exceeded my high expectations. Nuffield Scholar and board member, Ruth McCabe, brought her infectious energy and set the tone for the day. During the business meeting portion of the morning, Iowa Ag Secretary Mike Naig spoke to the great work all of us commissioners are doing and talked about the expansion of the Working Lands Project. After lunch, Iowa Assistant Attorney General, Eric Dirth, gave legal updates to attendees. The information Eric presents is always useful and the Q & A portion of the presentation never lacks thoughtful questions and answers. The final speaker of the day was Adam Schneiders who is the Iowa DNR Water Quality Coordinator. Adam gave us a history of water quality from the early 1900's when industrial and municipal sewage was dumped directly into the rivers, up to present day. We are making progress and there is data to back that up, but we have much more to do. The DNR is using LIDAR to identify best management practices on Iowa's landscape, along with helping towns and cities improve and update their water treatment systems.

During the business portion of the day, the delegate body debated and voted on six resolutions that didn't get directly voted up or down in pre-conference voting. In total, 13 Resolutions were brought **—Continued on Page 2**

--Continued from Page 1 -- before the commissioners. I want to thank all counties who put forth these resolutions. The resolutions guide our policy and prioritize talking points when talking to Legislators. T.C. Loving and I were elected to our 2nd term as vice president and president respectfully.

Thank you to all commissioners who made the trip to Ames and participated in the conference. I think I counted close to a dozen who were attending for the first time. I hope all who attended felt the conference was a valuable experience and were able to bring some knowledge home to local districts and communities.

Conservation Districts of Iowa is in a great position today. The Region directors who make up the board are cognizant and engaged on the issues facing Iowans currently. We have an excellent Executive Director, Dien Judge, and now that the grant suspensions and government shutdown are in the rear-view mirror, we can focus on empowering local districts to be champions in affecting positive outcomes in soil and water conservation.

Executive Director's Report

By Dien Judge

It's always a big relief when we close the books on another CDI Annual Conference. But once it is complete, we immediately start thinking about next year's conference!

Thanks once again to all SWCD commissioners, assistant commissioners, partners and staff who joined us in Ames last week. I have heard a lot of positive comments, and I believe everyone had an enjoyable and educational time at the conference.

Our main task at the conference is always to conduct the annual meeting of the organization, elect a president, vice president and discuss and vote on resolutions. Your input as commissioners is vital to steering this organization in the right direction. This is the event that sets the vision and focus of the organization for the year to come, and I was pleased to hear a lot of healthy dialogue and debate about ideas. The voting is complete, and now your resolutions will be updated. The current CDI Resolutions packet will then be taken to the Iowa Legislature and, when relevant to federal-level issues, to NACD for further discussion at the national level. CDI is an important organization to our state legislators and members of Congress, since we represent 500 locally elected experts on conservation from every corner of the state of Iowa. We will make sure your voice is heard.

I want to take a little time here to thank everyone who worked hard to make the annual conference a success. CDI Program Coordinator Regan Davis, CDI Communications Assistant Dashae Engler, Planning Coordinators Madison Conley and Olivia Ziegler, and CDI Wetland Engineering Technician Thomas Creamer were all there to help make sure everything went smoothly.

We want to hear from you about the conference. If you attended and did not turn in a conference evaluation form, please send us a note and share your thoughts about how we can improve this event for the future. If you did not attend, please let us know why. Is there a better date or time of year to have the conference? Is there a better venue? Is there a better speaker or topics? Sharing your ideas will help us improve this event. Thanks for sharing your thoughts, we hope to see you at next year's conference!

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

*Please send us your stories to dashae@cdiowa.org
and we'll share them
with our members and partners!*

Conservation Districts of Iowa Celebrates 80 Years of Conservation Work

CDI Annual Conference was held August 25 in Ames

Another CDI Annual Conference is officially in the books! We are incredibly grateful to our commissioners, sponsors, officers, guests, and everyone who attended our 80th Annual Conference. It was inspiring to gather with so many individuals who dedicate their lives to conservation and preserving our natural resources.

We changed the schedule around this year for the 80th conference. Attendees who arrived on Monday evening were welcomed with an informal President's Reception at Gateway. Then things got started early on Tuesday with a breakfast including a formal welcome by CDI President Sean Dolan and State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee Chairperson Ramona Nitz. This was followed by a keynote presentation by agronomist Ruth McCabe. After a break to visit our sponsors, the CDI Annual Business Meeting of our organization was held.



Left to Right: IDALS Senior Environmental Specialist Senior Mike Franklin, IDLAS Field Service Bureau Chief Will Myers, and IDALS Field Representative Kyle Ament.



CDI's Annual Conference breakfast buffet.

All locally elected Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners from dues-paying districts were eligible to participate in this meeting, where important votes were conducted on CDI Resolutions. Members also conducted the election of the CDI President and Vice President, re-elected Sean Dolan as president and TC Loving as vice-president. During the business meeting, attendees heard from Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig and received a legislative update from CDI lobbyist Jim Obradovich. A report from CDI Executive Director Dien Judge was also presented.

Commissioner's participation in this annual meeting is important to the success of our organization. CDI Resolutions passed at the annual meeting involving state

policies were taken to the Iowa Legislature and pushed by CDI's professional lobbyist.

Resolutions involving federal policy were advanced and moved through the resolutions process in the National Association of Conservation Districts.

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Question and Answer portion of Ruth McCabe's presentation.

Following the business meeting, a luncheon was held and conservation leaders from all around the state were honored with awards. In the afternoon, those in attendance heard a presentation from Iowa Assistant Attorney General Eric Dirth, who was available to answer questions from

commissioners about their legal duties and obligations. Later in the afternoon, attendees heard from Iowa DNR Water Quality Coordinator Adam Schneiders, who focused his presentation on nitrate pollution and water quality improvement efforts and challenges.

Lastly, on Wednesday there was an optional guided tour at Helland Farm. During the tour Nick Helland, the farmer, showcased his farm and his conservation practices.

Thank you again to our commissioners, sponsors, officers, guests, and CDI team for helping make this year's conference possible. We are grateful for your support and remain committed to making the conference stronger each year. If you have suggestions or comments to help us improve next year's event, please email admin@cdiowa.org.



Left to Right: CDI's President Sean Dolan CDI's and Executive Director Dien Judge during the President Welcome remarks.



CDI's Annual Business Meeting where commissioners discuss legislative updates, Executive Director's Report, and IDALS update.



Helland Farm Field Day Tour

Nick Helland shared that conservation farming has been part of his family for generations. His father and grandfather both practiced conservation, and their example helped shape his own commitment to caring for the land.



During the tour, guests saw Helland's saturated buffer control box and wetland. The saturated buffer control box helps regulate the amount of water leaving the field and does much more with improving quality. The wetland also provides numerous environmental benefits, including biodiversity and natural filtration of water.

Award Winners from the CDI Annual Conference

OUTSTANDING SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSIONER
Presented by Sean Dolan, CDI President
Recipient: Cindy Valin (Polk SWCD) Cindy Valin passed away in early 2026.
Accepting the award on behalf of the honoree: Her husband Paul Valin, her son Nate Valin and his children Ivan Valin and Oskar Valin.



Paul Johnson Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District:
Presented by Sean Dolan, CDI President
Recipient: Dubuque Soil and Water Conservation: David Ruden, Eric Schemechel, Wayne Demmer, Jeff Schimtt, and Helen Backes

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**KEN WAGNER OUTSTANDING BEGINNING
SWCD COMMISSIONER AWARD**
Presented by Sean Dolan, CDI President
Recipient: Tom Moss (Madison SWCD)

**RUTH WAGNER
OUTSTANDING ASSISTANT
SWCD COMMISSIONER
AWARD**
*Presented by Sean Dolan,
CDI President*
*Recipient: David Brand
(Audubon SWCD) and
pictured his wife, Ellen.*



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**CDI HONORARY MEMBERS
AWARD**

***Presented by Sean Dolan,
CDI President***

***Recipients: John Sellers
(Wayne SWCD) and Jon
Hubbert NRCS-retired
Accepting the award on
behalf of the honoree: His
son Chuck Sellers and wife
Erika Sellers.***

**CDI PRESIDENT'S
RECOGNITION AWARD**

***Presented by Sean Dolan,
CDI President***

***Recipient: Past President
Jeri Thornsberry, (Black
Hawk SWCD)***



CDI raised money for a good cause

Results for the Scholarship Silent Auction

The results for the silent auction are in! CDI raised \$1,591 through the Scholarship Silent Auction. Thank you to everyone who donated auction items, placed bids, or supported the event. These contributions help CDI support Iowa students interested in conservation and agriculture.

First-year college scholarships help open doors for young people who may become the next generation of conservation leaders. The program gives CDI a meaningful way to support students who are ready to learn, serve, and bring their talents back to Iowa communities. We are still looking for contributions. Districts can help by contributing at least \$100 to the CDI Scholarship Fund to help keep the program strong and sustainable.

If donations exceed the current funding schedule, CDI can increase scholarship awards and support even more deserving students. Scholarship funds are raised primarily through the conference silent auction and generous cash donations from individual supporters and districts, which have contributed \$3,750.

Scholarship information is available at <https://www.cdiowa.org/get-involved/scholarships/>.

“We are very grateful for these funds because they support a great cause, we get to help the next conservation leaders of the future,” said CDI’s Executive Director Dien Judge.

Hydrostation Project Advances Real-Time Water Monitoring in Iowa

Bringing water data to every Iowa county

Lee Tesdell, a second alternate director for CDI, showcased his hydrologic weather stations, also known as hydrostations, on his prairie strip north of Alleman, Iowa, during an Iowa Flood Center and Iowa Geological Survey media event on August 7. The project is funded through congressional Community Project Funding supported by Representative Zach Nunn.

The primary purpose of the hydrostations is to help researchers understand, monitor, and forecast water-use conditions across Iowa. The stations are also intended to support a better understanding of the long- and short-term impacts of climate change on water, reducing risk from floods and droughts.

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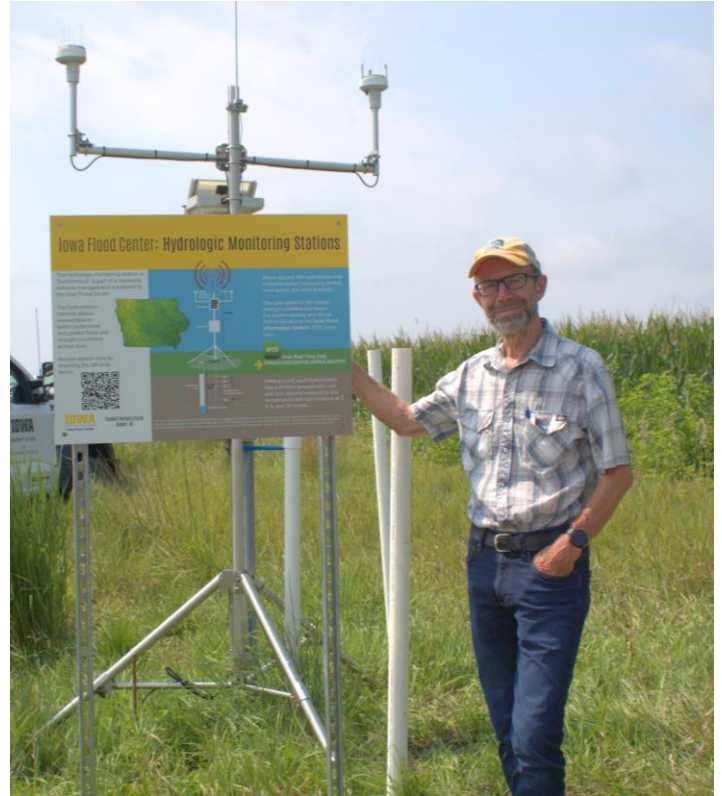
Are you receiving the Connections newsletter to your email inbox?

If you haven’t been receiving it and would like to be added to our mailing list,
please send a note to dien@cdiowa.org

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The Iowa Flood Center's goal is to establish one hydrostation in every county. Collected parameters include wind speed, wind direction, rainfall, shallow groundwater levels, soil moisture, soil temperature, and shallow groundwater temperature. The data are collected in real time, updated every 15 minutes, and provided at no cost to farmers or landowners. Farmers can use this data to better understand their soil.

They are being installed across southwestern Iowa within the next few months. If you want to be considered for a hydrostation please email giannini@uiowa.edu.



Lee Tesdall (Polk SWCD), region six second alternate director, showcasing his hydrostation.

IDALS Certificate of Recognition

Kahla Johnson receives IDALS Award

One of our CDI's Administrative Support Specialists, Kahla Johnson, has received an Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) Certificate of Recognition, presented by Will Myers, IDALS Field Services Bureau Chief. Dien Judge, our Executive Director, was also there to show his support.

This recognition is not given out often and highlights Kahla's dedication and willingness to go above and beyond when it comes to work, she does. We are very proud to see Kahla recognized for her hard work and dedication! Kahla was nominated by Diana Williams, a Conservation Assistant for IDALS.



Photo from left to right: IDLAS Field Service Bureau Chief Will Myers, CDI's Administrative Support Specialists Kahla Johnson, and CDI's Executive Director Dien Judge.

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Diana said this about Kahla:

"[She] was nominated because her focus is intentionally direct, and she takes on tasks with intensity and purpose. She has tremendous ability to solve problems while making it look easy. No job is too big or unimportant, in fact, those thoughts don't exist in her being. Kahla has revamped the Albia office compliance files to Tier/Range/Township/Section and has prepared an EXCEL spreadsheet to track/cross reference for the ease of staff. In completing this daunting task, she moved forward with boxing the files to prepare for the Albia office move.

Without pause, she established a method to address older program files such as EQIP & CSP for purging



Front row, left to right:
Shannon Esser, Deborah Morgan-Lennie, Kahla Johnson, Diana Williams, Courtney Brinegar
Second row, left to right: Hilary Lanman, Cindy Gatlin, Stacy Prassas, Dien Judge, Thomas Creamer, Will Myers, Jessie Uitermarkt, Suzy Flattery, and Korina Bodisch at USDA-NRCS Service Center in Albia, Iowa.

documents via the PSA's visit to the office. Kahla took the lead in going through old cost-share files, and after consulting with the DC & CA, was able to purge unnecessary documentation prior to the move. Imagine being in an office for nearly 27

years with some staff that believe in keeping EVERYTHING... and now it's time to move offices; the paperwork & resources, relevant and non-relevant, is overwhelming. Although others' assistance was greatly appreciated and not meant to be minimized, it was with organization, dedication and swift work that Kahla made possible, the move to the new building (although she would say she "helped" and "Teamwork makes the dream work"). Kahla's persistent drive to accomplish tasks has been and is a motivational sight. More recently, she has taken on tasks to assist with program payments and contracting. Kahla's willingness to assist, ability to adapt, and desire to learn for success is beyond expectation and the Albia office is more than blessed to have her on their team."

Register for Women Landowners Leading Regeneration Program

The Center for Regenerative Agriculture offers women landowners a unique opportunity to connect with peers, build confidence in conservation decision-making, and learn how to implement regenerative practices through thoughtful planning and strong tenant partnerships. The Women Landowners Leading Regeneration program aims to expand conservation and regenerative farming practices in Kansas, Iowa, and Missouri by empowering women non-operating landowners to take a more active role in managing their farmland.

The program begins October 1st with an in-person workshop at a vineyard in St. Charles, Iowa, followed by three virtual sessions later in the month. Registration closes on September 17th. For questions or more information, contact Makayla Zimmerman at vorism@missouri.edu.