

---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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President's Report

By Sean Dolan

Only four short months ago, I was writing to you about wanting to get the oats seeded. Now at the end of July, the oats are harvested and the straw is baled.

The oat crop was great and the straw was the cleanest and brightest I have ever raised. I plan to level out some old tile lines on this ground before drilling in a fall grazing mix. Summer has absolutely flown by as it always seems to do!

At CDI, we are preparing for the Annual Conference which will be held in Ames on August 24th through the 26th. As I have mentioned before, we moved the meeting and speaker portion to Tuesday.

We have a powerful and informative line up of speakers this year. I will be joined by State Soil Conservation And Water Quality Committee Chairperson Ramona Nitz to open the conference. Conservation agronomist, Ruth McCabe, will follow. Her passion for conservation in Iowa matches all of ours and I look forward to her presentation! During our business meeting we will hear from Iowa Ag Secretary, Mike Naig and our lobbyist, Jim Obradovich. After lunch, Eric Dirth from the Iowa Attorney General's office will speak. Eric has been a highlight of the conference over the last several years and he always presents on topics that are pertinent to our role as commissioners. Our final speaker of the day is Adam Schneiders from the Department of Natural Resources. I have been told that his nitrate presentation is powerful and I am excited to see it.

We have six resolutions to debate and vote on in our meeting. Thank you to all counties who brought forth resolutions. Enacted resolutions are what guide the policies here at CDI and dictates our issues to discuss when talking to both our state and national legislators.

Monday of the conference we have an executive board meeting in the afternoon and I will host a reception/social for everyone to see old friends and meet new ones. Please plan on attending. **—Continued on Page 2**

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I would like to welcome Dashae Engler to CDI. Dashae recently came to CDI as the Communication Assistant. If you have any pictures or stories you would like to share in the monthly *Connections* newsletter, Dashae will be the point of contact.

Have a great August and I look forward to seeing all of you at the Annual Conference in a few weeks.

--Sean

Executive Director's Report

By Dien Judge

We're really looking forward to our Annual Conference, which is coming up very soon. Here at CDI, we've put a lot of thought into ways to improve the conference and hopefully bring more commissioners and partners together for this annual event. We've listened to the many comments from recent years and we hope you enjoy what we've come up with. The end of August will be here very soon, so please get registered and plan to join your colleagues for a great opportunity to network and share ideas.

We have several great presentations lined up for the conference once again. I want to highlight one of the speakers who will be doing a presentation on a very important topic. Iowa Department of Natural Resources Water Quality Resources Coordinator Adam Schnieders will do a science-based presentation on Iowa's water quality, focusing on nitrate pollution. I'm sure you're all aware of how important this subject is to Iowans, and how Iowa's 500 locally elected Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners can play an important role in solving this problem. Adam's presentation will provide attendees with valuable fact-based information so you can make informed decisions at the local level.

It's also time to ask you to dig deep and support our annual fundraising drive for our scholarship fund. CDI gives out \$9,000 in scholarships every year to deserving students from every region of the state. A big part of the fundraising drive involves the Silent Auction at the annual conference. Please consider donating an item or two to the auction, or please consider sending in a cash donation to support this worthy cause.

Lastly, we want you all to give a warm welcome to our new CDI Communications Assistant Dashae Engler. Dashae will serve an important role in fulfilling the mission of CDI: to inform, educate and lead through our local districts to promote the conservation of natural resources. We hope you'll help by letting us know about events, projects or success stories in your area that we can help share with everyone in the state.

Last Call for Annual Conference 'Early Bird' Registration Soon

CDI Annual Conference to be held August 25 in Ames

We are very close to our 80th Annual Conference at the Gateway Hotel & Conference Center in Ames in August. We hope to see you there! Early Bird registration ends Aug. 3, so get registered soon.

Several exciting changes to the conference schedule have been made this year, and once again all Iowa Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners can attend free of charge (this includes overnight hotel stay on Aug. 24 and 25). All Registration costs --Continued on Page 3

--Continued from Page 2 for SWCD commissioners and assistant commissioners will once again be covered by the generous support of Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

All 500 Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners are welcome to attend and participate in the conference.

Changes to the schedule of events at the conference will allow most of the conference events to be held on one day, Tuesday, Aug. 25, with the exciting addition of an optional tour on Wednesday, Aug. 26 of the nearby Helland Farm featuring some excellent examples of soil and water conservation practices and structures.

Conference attendees who arrive on Monday evening, Aug. 24, will be welcomed with an informal President's Reception at 7:00 PM at Gateway.

Then things get started early on Tuesday, Aug. 25, with a breakfast at 6:30 AM including a formal Welcome by CDI President Sean Dolan and State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee chairperson Ramona Nitz. This will be followed by a keynote presentation by agronomist Ruth McCabe.

After a break to visit our sponsors, the CDI Annual Business Meeting of our organization is held. All locally elected Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners from dues-paying districts are eligible to participate in this meeting, where important votes are conducted on CDI Resolutions. Members will also conduct the election of the CDI President and Vice President.

During the business meeting, attendees will hear from Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig, and will also receive a legislative update from CDI lobbyist Jim Obradovich. A report from CDI Executive Director Dien Judge will also be presented.

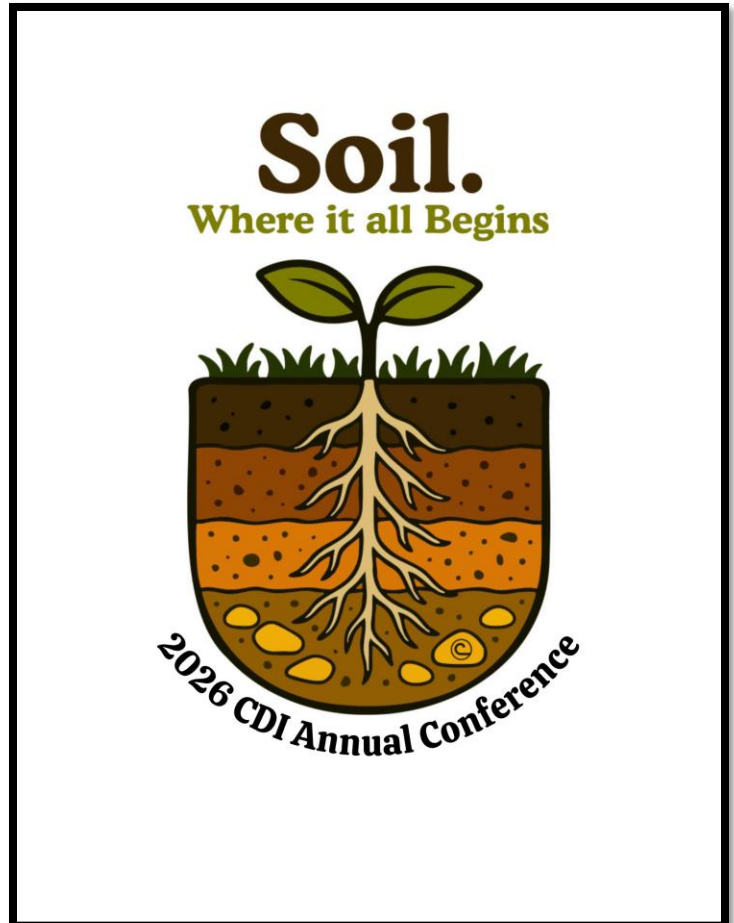
Your participation in this annual meeting is important to the success of your organization in the future. CDI Resolutions passed at the annual meeting involving state policies are taken to the Iowa Legislature and pushed by CDI's professional lobbyist. Resolutions involving federal policy are advanced and moved through the resolutions process in the

National Association of Conservation Districts. Your involvement in this process at the CDI Annual Conference is critical to making your voice heard to influence government policies involving conservation programs.

Following the business meeting, a luncheon will be held and conservation leaders from all around the state will be honored with awards.

In the afternoon, those in attendance will hear a presentation from Iowa Assistant Attorney General Eric Dirth, who will be available to answer questions from commissioners about their legal duties and obligations. And later in the afternoon, attendees will hear from Iowa DNR Water Quality Coordinator Adam Schneiders, who will focus his presentation on nitrate pollution and water quality improvement efforts and challenges. --

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Conference registration forms have been distributed to all Conservation Assistants, so please plan to register and attend the CDI Annual Conference. The "Early Bird" registration period ends Aug. 3, so please get registered soon.

Optional farm tour event to be held on August 26

The following day, on Wednesday, Aug. 26, is an optional guided tour of the nearby Helland Farm, which will be included with the conference registration. This tour will show many successful conservation practices on the farm.

For more information about registration, go to <https://www.cdiowa.org/annual-conference/>. Rooms can be reserved after completing the registration process. For hotel booking assistance, please feel free to call Gateway at 800-FOR-AMES.

Resolutions to be discussed during annual meeting

CDI Resolutions serve as the guiding principles in both local and statewide conservation efforts. It is essential to review and revise these resolutions annually to ensure they reflect the needs of our membership and evolving conservation challenges. Changes and additions to the resolutions undergo a process that ensures that they reflect the intentions of CDI members.

After reviewing 13 resolutions that were proposed by local districts this year, the Pre-Conference voting process was completed this month. For complete details on the voting results, please go to the Resolutions page on the CDI website by clicking here:

<https://cdiowa.org/resources/resolutions/resolution-pre-conference-voting-results/>

As a result of the Pre-Conference votes, two resolutions were passed and five resolutions failed. The resolutions that passed were ***Resolution 5: To Ensure NRCS Employees Continue Working During Government Shutdowns and Are Deemed "Essential Workers"*** and ***Resolution 8: To Simplify and Expedite the Cultural Resources Determination Process***. The remaining six resolutions will be discussed and debated during the CDI annual business meeting during the conference on Aug. 25.

Raising funds for a good cause

Consider donating items for the Scholarship Silent Auction

The CDI Scholarship Program is funded by your donations, including donations for the annual conference "Silent Auction". Will you contribute this year? The Conservation Districts of Iowa Board of Directors has renewed its commitment to partnering with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts to support Iowa students who are interested in conservation and agriculture.

Through first-year college scholarships, we can help open doors for young people who may become the next generation of conservation leaders. These scholarships give us --Continued on Page 5

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a meaningful way to support students who are ready to learn, serve, and bring their talents back to Iowa communities. Scholarship funds are raised primarily through the silent auction at the conference and through generous cash donations from individual supporters. Whether your support comes from an auction item, a cash gift, or even a required distribution from your IRA, every contribution helps.

What to donate to this year's auction? Here are 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!
- Iowa's Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners know how important it is to invest in the future of conservation.



"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 Past President Jeri Thornsberry

For decades, commissioners across the state have helped keep this scholarship program alive. The CDI Board asks that each district contribute at least \$100 to the Scholarship Fund so it remains strong and sustainable. If donations exceed the current funding schedule, we can increase scholarship awards and support even more deserving students.

We also encourage each district to continue promoting local scholarship opportunities for high school seniors and to forward your top applicant to your Regional Director for consideration in the statewide process. (<https://www.cdiowa.org/get-involved/scholarships/>)

"Thank you for continuing to invest in Iowa's future conservation leaders," said CDI Past President Jeri Thornsberry. "These scholarships are more than financial assistance—they are a way of saying we believe in these young people and the future they will help build."

Iowa Envirothon Team Competes at international event in Mississippi

We are excited to announce Decorah's "Naturally Selected" team placed 24th at the 2026 Annual NFC-Envirothon. The competition was held at Mississippi State University in Starkville, Mississippi. The team won first place in the Iowa Envirothon competition in April and represented Iowa on an international level July 19th through 25th.

The NFC-Envirothon mission is to educate students about the environment and conservation of natural resources through hands-on outdoor experiences, academic study and collaborative competitions.

We are very proud of the work Atticus Raabe, Thatcher Brown, Jack Hammell, Thomas Davis, Oskar Swanson and their coach Larry Berland displayed at Envirothon. The team's competition consists of hands-on and paper tests for the four different categories; Forestry, Soil and Land Use, Aquatic Ecology, and Wildlife. They also gave an oral presentation on the annual rotating current-event topic this year called, Soil. Where It All Begins.



Left to Right: Thomas Davis, Thatcher Brown, Atticus Raab, Oskar Swanson, and Jack Hammell, the Naturally Selected Envirothon team.

Vice President and Past President Represent CDI at NACD Summer Meeting in Michigan

CDI Vice President TC Loving and Past President Jeri Thornsberry represented Conservation Districts of Iowa at the National Association of Conservation Districts Summer Meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

2026 NACD Summer Meeting attendees had a busy week hopping from board to committee to region meetings. The NACD Board of Directors convened to hear updates from NACD leadership, financial reports, and new strategic plan implementation.

The District and Partner Relations, Legislative, and Natural Resources Committees gathered their representatives from across the country to provide updates and make plans for the upcoming months. All seven regions also met to share information, listen to speakers, hear updates from partners, and more.



CDI Vice President TC Loving and Past President Jeri Thornsberry at the NACD Summer Meeting.

SHAPE Project is Looking for Farmers and Landowners to Participate in Soil Testing

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) is seeking farmers and landowners who are willing to volunteer their land for soil testing as part of the Soil Health Assessment Protocol and Evaluation (SHAPE) project. SHAPE has been in development for approximately four to five years.

The project was developed by Kristen Veum, an Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientist in Columbia, Missouri. The goal of SHAPE is to create a robust, regionally relevant soil health tool that farmers can understand and use to support conservation management decisions. The project seeks participation from fields with soil in various stages of health.

Eligibility requirements include the following:

- Participate in a Zoom meeting during which a facilitator will guide you through a management survey for two to three fields.
- Grant facilitators access to hand-probe soil samples from each field.
- Ensure each field is at least 10 acres to be eligible.

Participants will receive the following:

- Compensation for their time, approximately \$170.
- A free report on the status of their soil health.
- A hard copy of *Probing Our Country's Soil Health*, a photo book.

If you are interested in participating, click [here](#) to schedule your first appointment via Zoom through Calendly. CDI will also send out emails with more information in the upcoming weeks.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

VIDEO: HOW TO ENROLL:

Click here: [Probing Our Country's Soil Health](#) or scan the code to watch a short video about the project.



Dashae Engler Joins CDI as Communication Assistant

We are excited to announce that Dashae Engler has joined the Conservation Districts of Iowa as communications assistant. She will work on a variety of projects, including social media, the *Connections* newsletter, the CDI website, sustainable farming stories and more. Engler also will help with the annual conference in August.

"I'm happy to join when I did. I'm excited about my first conference with the team. I don't know what to expect, and I think that's the fun part," Engler said.

In May, Engler graduated from Drake University with a Bachelor of Arts in journalism. She wrote for five student publications and contributed digital stories to the regional magazine *Midwest Living*. Engler wants to bring her storytelling skills to CDI and connect with people through water and soil conservation.

"I'm most proud of my writing when I'm teaching people things through my pieces. I care a lot about sustainability, what that looks like, and how we can improve our planet for the next generation," Engler said.

In her role, Engler will assist Executive Director Dien Judge and Program Coordinator Reagan Davis. The three will work closely together in the Des Moines office. "Dashae is going to be a great asset to the team. I know she will do great work, and I'm excited to see what stories she brings to CDI," Judge said.



The new communication assistant Dashae Engler joined CDI this week.

Public Information Training Required for Newly Elected Officials

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.

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](#).