

---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

The weather in September has certainly presented us with many challenges. Excess moisture is delaying harvest and most other field operations. My seed cleaning setup requires the seed to be on wagons outside, so I am also finding it challenging to get everything processed. On the bright side, all the acres of cover crops that were flown on should have had ample heat and moisture to get a quick start.

One quick final note on the 2026 Annual Conference. Thank you to all who filled out evaluation forms and dropped them off. Dien compiled all forms and shared with the board. I appreciate all the comments (both positive and negative) and suggestions. We have already made some changes in the development of our plans for the 2027 conference.

My county's five-year plan is coming up for renewal. I'm not sure why, but the thought of going through the process causes me some stress. I am proud of the plan we put together 5 years ago and there is satisfaction when we look at the plan and can see how our actions fit into the five goals we set. Madison Conley has assured me that she and Olivia Ziegler (CDI's two Planning Coordinators) will help make the plans come together in seamless fashion. We will not be starting from scratch this time. I encourage all counties to review the five priorities in the plan quarterly. It helps to keep focus and when the time comes to renew the plan, you'll have an idea of what priority needs to be revised or swapped out. I hope everyone has a safe and enjoyable fall!

Sean



Despite September's challenging weather conditions, Sean Dolan's cover crops are showing promising results.

Executive Director's Report

By Dien Judge

With this continuing pattern of heavy rain—and economic factors beyond our control—we know it's a difficult time for Iowa farmers. At least in the near future, weather forecasts are looking better...so we're hoping there's some drying of farmland to allow folks to get their crops harvested this fall.

Summer has come to an end, and with our CDI Annual Conference behind us, it's time to start looking ahead and beginning to plan for next year's events and activities. I'm really proud of our CDI staff members and the work they do every day to fulfill the mission of CDI over the course of the last year. We're nearly fully staffed in all of our programs, and it's great to hear about all the work that is being done by our employees to promote and implement conservation practices all around the state. That's why we're starting a new feature this month in *CONNECTIONS*. We're going to bring a brief spotlight article about one of our CDI employees each month and highlight the work they do for the Soil and Water Conservation Districts in their area. These CDI employees are getting a lot of important work done, but sometimes you don't hear about it. We want to make sure everyone knows about this hard work. This month's feature is about Katie Fetting, who has been with CDI since January 2024, helping private landowners with wetland projects. These wetland projects are some of our strongest tools in improving water quality in Iowa, as they act as natural filters that reduce nitrate levels in our water and control sediment loss.

Our CDI Communications Assistant, Dashae Engler, will be writing these articles for *CONNECTIONS* so we can share these important stories. Dashae is also looking for stories to share about farmers implementing successful conservation on their land, as well as events, field days, and other local stories that could be shared statewide. Please let us know, send us an email or give us a call.

Looking ahead, we want to encourage you to plan to participate in some of our upcoming CDI events. Our annual Conservation Partnership Day will be held in conjunction with Celebrate Iowa's Outdoors Day on February 9, 2027, at the Iowa Capitol. Please plan to attend and participate. And Spring Regionals are being scheduled for the last week of February and the first week of March, so please mark your calendars!

Leadership Opportunity Through NCF

The National Conservation Foundation (NCF) is now accepting applications for the 2027 Next Generation Leadership Institute (NGLI). This is a yearlong leadership development program designed to prepare conservation district leaders to lead local, state, and national conservation efforts.

Through hands-on training and professional development, participants will be equipped with the leadership, communication, strategic planning, and networking skills needed to address today's most pressing natural resource challenges.

To be eligible, applicants must be currently serving conservation district officials who want to build their potential for conservation leadership roles. Applications also need to demonstrate a commitment to future district service and include letters of support from both their local conservation district and their state or territory association.

Applications and application fees must be received by 11:59 p.m. ET on Saturday, October 31. Interviews will begin in November. Applicants will pay a \$50 application fee to be considered for the program, and if an offer of enrollment is accepted, they will pay \$1,200 tuition. The application fee may be submitted through PayPal.

Some scholarship opportunities exist for select individuals, and a payment plan option is available (Contact ncfnextgen@nacdn.net).

To learn more and apply, visit <https://www.nationalconservationfoundation.org/ngli>.

CDI Employee Spotlight: Katie Fetting

Katie Fetting, one of our longest-serving CDI Conservation Wetland Specialists, doesn't come from a farm background. She does, however, remember going to her parents' small, shack-like house in the woods in Wisconsin. At this cozy spot, she and her family would go fishing, run in the woods, and pick wild blueberries. Since then, she has been interested in everything in nature, especially bugs, because she loves how such small creatures can have such a huge story to tell.

"There are just so many forms of life that are so different from each other in really beautiful ways," Fetting said.

Fetting doesn't work with small creatures at CDI, but they do inhabit the farm fields where she helps facilitate wetlands through a NRCS program. She started working at CDI in Fairfield in January 2024 and is now in Sioux City. She enjoys the change of scenery.

"Southeast Iowa is very riverine. A lot of it is very forested. [Sioux City] is a lot more open. More prairie, less trees," Fetting said. "There's also really cool geological features, like the Prairie Pothole region and the Loess Hills. Not anything like that in Southeast Iowa, so that's been fun to get to explore."

The job of a CDI Conservation Wetland Specialist consists of two seasons: fieldwork season and paperwork season. Although she is transitioning to the latter, she loves fieldwork season. During the field season, she's driving to sites. She either goes alone or the landowners will join her, and they will talk about wetland easement management. Easements are legal property rights given to a person/organization who doesn't own the property but is utilizing the land for a specific purpose.

Typically, in these agreements, the landowner will only use the section of land for non-agriculture related things, like hunting. Then the organization will come in and put in prairies, wetlands, or whatever will be beneficial to water/wildlife in that area.

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In Fetting's case, these are wetland easements. Under the Farm Bill, there are specific wetland protection programs for land that would have been a wetland as far back as 1800s. When people settled in 1850s and later, they put in agricultural tile and drainage ditches to try to drain the wetlands and convert them to cropland. So, Fetting's job is looking for land that has been converted to crops and changing it back to its natural state.

"This land gets protected forever. It's really cool that we're creating permanent habitat, and it won't ever get converted back into corn or soybeans," she said.

Now she is in her paperwork season, where the primary task is writing compatible use authorizations (CUAs). CUAs are long-term agreements, typically lasting for 10 years, between NRCS and the landowner that give landowners permission to do certain management activities. These activities include prescribed fires, removing trees, and more.

Through it all, she is happy to be learning, and she is glad that working for CDI gives her opportunities to gain experience in new things, such as plant identification, which she finds fascinating.

As the leaves are turning red this fall, she is learning how to make stewardship plans. This is similar to what she already does, giving landowners permission to do work, but NRCS pays them to do the work on the field. This is for projects that NRCS believes would have a large effect and would want to invest in. Lastly, further down the line, she wants to learn how to do applications.

"My goal, kind of the whole time that I have been with CDI, has been to learn. These are designed to be development positions, and I feel like I'm continuing to develop," she said. "I'll learn about another thing that I don't fully understand, and then I get time to dedicate to learning that thing."



Katie Fetting holding a dickcissel bird.

CDI's New Mass Email System

Stay Informed with CDI Updates, Announcements and the CONNECTIONS Newsletter

Everyone should have received an email on September 10 about CDI's Annual Report from Conservation Districts of Iowa via admin@cdiowa.org. We are adopting a new mass email system, hosted by Sender.net, to share information with our members and partners. We hope this system will allow us to provide information faster, more smoothly, and in greater detail.

This email system is for sending information only. Please email admin@cdiowa.org or dien@cdiowa.org if you have questions. Please make sure any email from us is affiliated with @cdiowa.org before clicking on the links.

If you have not received the email and you're a member or partner, please reach out so we can ensure we have the correct email address on file. We are also sending our newsletter, CONNECTIONS, to the public. If you are interested in receiving the CONNECTIONS emails directly in your inbox when it goes live, send us an email and we will happily add you to the mailing list.

CDI Attends Conferences in September

Connecting with industry leaders to explore the future of Iowa's water resources.

Conservation Districts of Iowa had a busy September, attending two conservation conferences: the Iowa Annual Water Conference near Lake Okoboji and the Iowa Environmental Council (IEC) Annual Conference at Drake University's Olmsted Center. Although the events differed, both reflected a shared commitment to leaving the land better for future generations. They also gave CDI a valuable opportunity to connect with the community, share our mission, and discuss the role of commissioners. We began the month at the Iowa Annual Water Conference.

Lake Okoboji itself has scenery that makes you want to slow down. Its expansive blue waters reflect the time and dedication of people who care about improving water quality, making it the perfect place to host the 2026 Iowa Annual Water Conference.

The Iowa Water Center at Iowa State University holds a water conference every year around September. This year, the three-day conference



Pictured above, West Hottes Lake is one of many lakes apart of the Iowa Shallow Lakes Initiative. The Iowa Shallow Lake Initiative's mission is to restore, protect, and enhance shallow lakes and wetlands in Iowa.

took place at Historic Arnolds Park next to the grand Lake Okoboji from September 15-17. CDI attended to promote our mission, newsletter, Iowa Envirothon, and our commissioners. However, we also participated in engaging conversations about conservation work across the state, and a little bit in Minnesota.



Pictured above, Chris Laure explaining all the wetland projects in Okoboji with Dusten Paulus holding the poster.

The conference provided an opportunity to explore these disciplines and see them put into practice.

The first day was the preconference, where participants joined a kayaking tour led by TED Talk speaker and photographer David Thoreson to explore Lake Okoboji or a bus tour with stops at several locations.

On the bus tour, participants visited a farm owned by John Boettcher, who plans to turn it over to his daughter, Emily, soon. They discussed the conservation practices they had implemented, such as cover crops, and shared sample crop seeds with participants. Throughout the day, guests visited various locations to learn about conservation practices that had been improved to

help wildlife and the water. There was also an opportunity to see lakes around the area of Lake Okoboji.

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The next two days were packed with panels, speakers, and breakout sessions focused on conservation. Discussions addressed water quality, with an emphasis on public health, nature-based infrastructure, agriculture-led conservation, and more.

Notably, the Iowa Environmental Council (IEC) and the Harkin Institute were speakers on the last day of the conference. They discussed the possible relationship between nitrates, pesticides, PFAS, and radon in the drinking water and Iowa's cancer crisis. IEC is a nonpartisan coalition focused on a healthy and sustainable future for Iowans. Its annual conference was also the second conference CDI attended in September.

IEC Annual Conference was held at Drake University's Olmsted Center on September 29. Their session talked about similar ideas as the conference near Lake Okoboji like water quality, agriculture, and more.

These conferences allow CDI to gain more information about conservation practices and the people behind them. It also allows us to promote and find the next set of commissioners who will have an active role shaping CDI's resolutions.



Pictured above, CDI Communications Assistant Dashae Engler and Iowa State grad-student Dennis Nkansah discussing CDI's mission at Iowa Annual Water Conference.



Pictured on the left, CDI employees Regan Davis and Dashae Engler at IEC Annual 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!*

Publicly Owned Lakes Watershed Project is Receiving Over \$400,000

Six lakes are receiving funding for more conservation practices.

On September 15, Iowa's Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Naig, announced that six Iowa Soil and Water Conservation Districts will receive more than \$400,000 in water quality cost-share funding through the Publicly Owned Lakes program. Funding will go to support conservation practices and to protect public lakes in central/southern Iowa. Practices included grassed waterways, cover crops, water and sediment control basin, grade stabilization structures, and terraces. Practices like these are assisting in reducing nutrient loss. By keeping the nutrients on the fields, it improves soil health, which is good for long term crop productivity and keeps nitrate out of local drinking waters. For more information, please check out Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy ([INRS](#)).

Every year, local SWCD submit applications to the DNR for funding. Once a district is selected landowners/farmers can receive cost-share assistance that goes towards water remediation. If a farmer/landowner is interested, they can talk to their local SWCD to see if they qualify.

Below are the districts and lakes that were selected along with their funding:

Lake	District(s)	Funding
Twelve Mile Lake	Adair & Union Counties SWCD	\$102,750.00
Lake Icaria	Adams County SWCD	\$91,350.00
Three Mile Lake	Adair & Union Counties SWCD	\$90,000.00
Lake Miami	Monroe County SWCD	\$54,600.00
West Lake	Clarke County SWCD	\$34,271.25
Badger Creek Lake	Madison & Dallas Counties SWCD	\$32,294.51
Total Investment		\$405,265.76

We are looking for more photos to feature on our website!

If you have conservation-minded photos you would like to share, please send them to admin@cdiowa.org. Your photo may be selected for our website. Before submitting, we ask that you have permission/rights to these photos.

Thank you for helping showcase conservation efforts in our community!

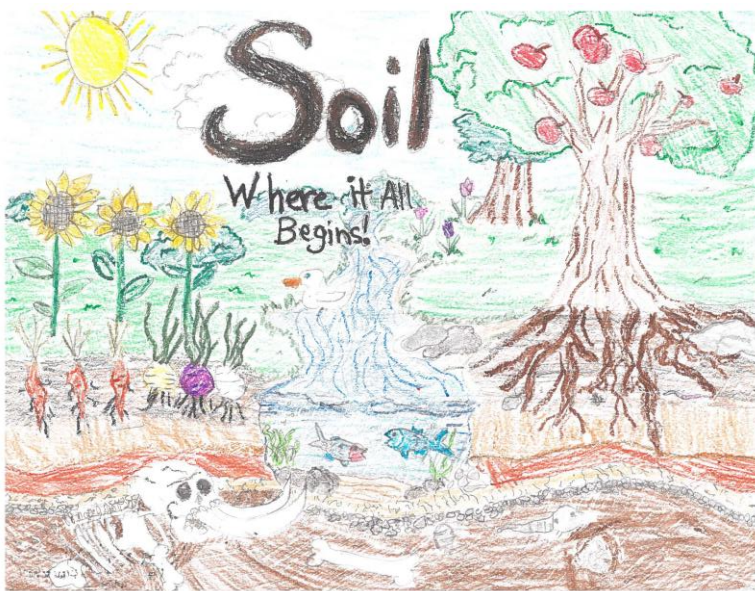
CDI Poster Contest Winners Announced

Entries were judged at CDI annual conference in August.

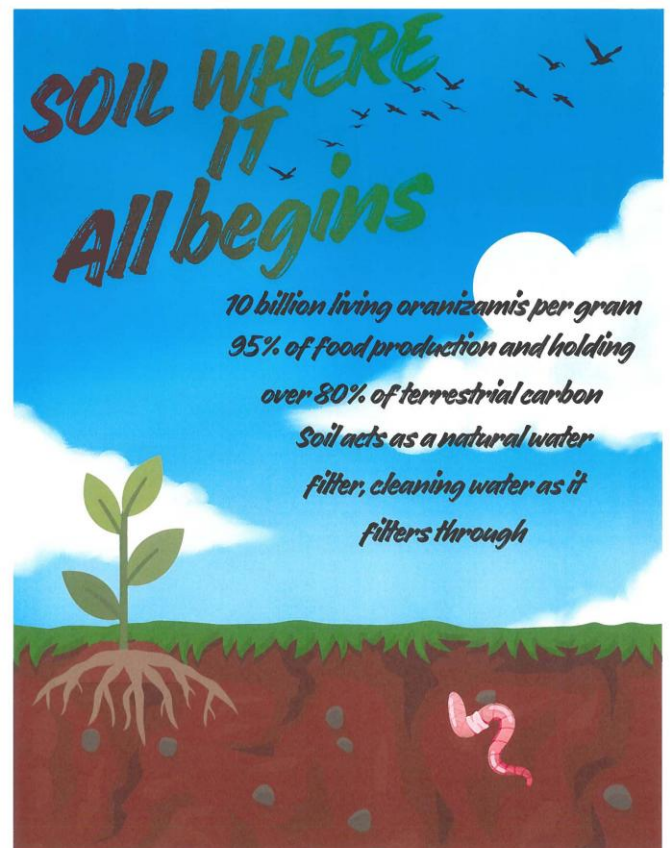
The results are in for the 2026 CDI Conservation Poster Contest winners. The theme for this year is “Soil: Where it all begins.” This theme celebrates the incredible power of soil to support life in all its forms. Students all over Iowa are diving into the vital resource right under their feet. They are learning how soil supports our food, natural habitats, and communities, and what that means to them through their own creations.

There are three categories: hand-drawn, digital, and Braille. Thank you to everyone who contributed and submitted conservation-focused posters. State winners received \$50, and regional winners received \$35. Special thanks to our new sponsor Green Cover.

Congratulations to our state winners; Ariana Adams, Scarlett Schany, Coy Creveling, Sadie Blankespoor, Amanda King, Anders Setterstrom, Roman Puterbaugh. To view the full list, click [here](#) and see the list and regional winners!



HD Division 1 – Ariana Adams –
Mahaska SWCD



Digital Division 4 – Anders Setterstrom –
Jefferson SWCD



HD Division 2 – Scarlett Schany – Palo Alto SWCD

HD Division 3 – Coy Creveling – Ringgold SWCD



HD Division 4 – Sadie Blankespoor – Sioux SWCD



Braille Division 3 – Roman Puterbaugh –
Palo Alto SWCD



HD Division 5 –
Amanda King – Sioux
SWCD