

# Iowa Current Developments

**February 2012**

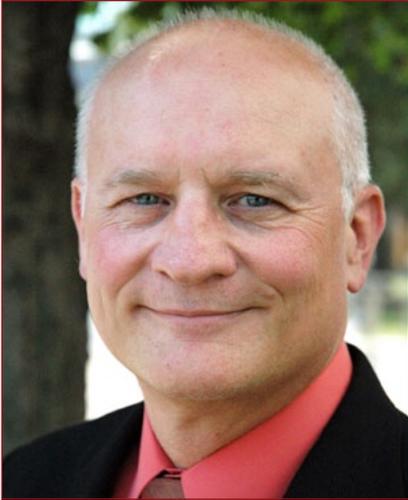


United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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## A Message from the: **State Conservationist**



*Richard Sims, State Conservationist*

### **Conservation Compliance Aerial Flights to Go Statewide**

Last year NRCS in Iowa conducted a pilot project in Areas 1 and 4 where we administered mandatory highly erodible land and wetland compliance reviews by taking pictures from a small airplane. There were enough positive items to take from this that I have decided to cover all initial compliance reviews from the air.

However, instead of using NRCS staff to fly along and take pictures, we have contracted with a firm to fly the entire list of tracts and take pictures at low elevation. We will have a Compliance Team review the pictures before a field visit is scheduled. This will allow for immediate knowledge of ephemeral gullies, waterways in need of repair, and the overall condition of the tract. Currently, I believe residue amounts will still need to be determined during the field review.

Another significant change will be the person conducting the field reviews. The local district conservationist will not be making the compliance review for anyone in their domicile county.

Overall, we learned several lessons from last year's pilot project:

- The darker the hue of the soil, the better it is to determine residue levels from the air.
- We needed additional details information from the case files when looking at tracts from the air.
- Ephemeral erosion is easily observed from the air, versus walking the tract.
- We dramatically improved the overall review quality with significant training to fewer people.

I will let you know the results of our 2012 reviews. The only way we will get better at our jobs is to try new ideas.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Sims". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## Iowa Current Developments

**Current Developments is a product of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Des Moines, Iowa, published bimonthly by the Iowa NRCS Public Affairs Staff in cooperation with NRCS and partner agency employees from across the state.**

### **Current Developments Stories and Photos**

*Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Greiner at [laura.greiner@ia.usda.gov](mailto:laura.greiner@ia.usda.gov).*

*Past issues can be found at [www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/currentdevelopments.html](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/currentdevelopments.html).*



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## Sesquicentennial Celebration: USDA Turns 150 on May 15

In 2012, USDA commemorates and celebrates the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our founding in 1862, when President Abraham Lincoln signed into law an act of Congress establishing the United States Department of Agriculture.

Two and one-half years later, in what would be his final annual message to Congress, Lincoln called USDA "The People's Department." At that time, about half of all Americans lived on farms, compared to about 2 percent today.

"Through our work on food, agriculture, economic development, science, natural resource conservation and a host of issues, USDA still fulfills Lincoln's vision - touching the lives of every American, every day," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

Vilsack says over the course of this year, "I hope that Americans will acknowledge and join in our commemoration of 150 years of USDA. It is a great time to learn about our contributions to the strength and health of this nation, and to see how we can continue to partner with Americans working to provide a better life for their families."

USDA kicked off the 150<sup>th</sup> celebration at the Agricultural Outlook Forum Feb. 23-24 in Arlington, VA. The program featured a panel of eight former Secretaries of Agriculture.

### Local Celebrations

In Iowa, NRCS will partner with Farm Service Agency, Rural Development and other USDA agencies to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at the Iowa State Fair and Farm Progress Show in August. There will be opportunities for employees statewide to participate in these activities. More information will be sent to NRCS employees as those dates draw near.

### Office Posters

Posters commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary will be sent to every USDA office this spring. No other 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary displays or exhibits are expected to be produced at this time.



### USDA 150th Anniversary Web Page

A USDA web page about the 150th Anniversary of the Department contains information about our history, including images, former Secretaries of Agriculture, and events throughout the year.

You can also sign up for e-mail updates about the anniversary, and receive information from the Department. For example, they recently sent these interesting USDA factoids:

***The USDA became a Cabinet level department of the federal government in 1889.***

***The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 was the first modern farm bill.***

***The USDA South Building in Washington D.C. was completed in 1937. At the time it was the largest office building in the nation.***

To access the 150th Anniversary web page, just go to [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov) and click on "USDA 150 Years" on the right side.

## NRCS Supports: I'll Make Me a World in Iowa

The Iowa Chapter of the National Organization of Black Professional NRCS Employees volunteered and sponsored a booth at the I'll Make Me a World in Iowa (IMMAWII) Celebration in Des Moines on Jan. 27, 2012.

IMMAWII is a diverse collaboration of Iowans which highlights African-American arts, culture and contributions through education, awareness and preservation during an annual enrichment celebration.

Lya Williams, a civil engineer in Ottumwa, estimates the NRCS group spoke with about 800 middle and high school age students.

"Students attended the event from all across Iowa," said Williams. "We wanted to make students aware of minorities in agriculture."

The NRCS group handed out brochures about volunteering with NRCS and starting a career with NRCS.



Members of the Iowa Chapter of the National Organization of Black Professional NRCS Employees who volunteered at the I'll Make Me a World in Iowa Celebration include (L to R): Stephanie Hill (President), Michelle Williams, Lya Williams (Treasurer), and James Ziegler. Not pictured: Jaia Fischer, Iowa NRCS Black Emphasis Program Manager, and Laura Greiner, Iowa NRCS Outreach Coordinator. (Photo by Greiner)

## Big Changes: New Planning, Contract Mgmt. Tools On the Way

Results of the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI) will be loaded to Iowa NRCS computers by Oct. 1, 2012.

The National CDSI Team, which includes our own Jennifer Dubendorf, is providing direction for our future conservation planning and contract management business tool. Two initial components – "Client Gateway" and "TA Desktop" – will be launched in October. Additional components will follow.

The CDSI components will provide a stronger connection between the NRCS computer-based conservation planning and contracting activities.

A high-level overview for State Technical Leads is scheduled for March 28 in Brookings, SD. Additional information will follow as we are updated, and detailed training for all users will be scheduled closer to implementation.

~John Hubbert,  
Iowa NRCS Assistant  
State Conservationist  
for Operations

## Golden Gnomes: Iowa NRCS Awarded for Most People's Gardens



Iowa NRCS was one of two states to be presented with a Golden Garden Gnome Award, as part of the USDA's People's Garden Initiative. There are more People's Gardens growing in Iowa (73) than in any other state.

Maryland NRCS received the other Golden Gnome for donating more produce (700,000 lbs.) during the 2011 growing season than any other state. In total, USDA donated 1.1 million pounds of fresh produce to local food banks and charities across the country through the 'Share Your Harvest' effort.

Nationally, NRCS was presented a 'golden shovel' for being the agency with the most number of People's Gardens. NRCS has created 385 gardens over a three-year period. These gardens range in type from growing healthy, nutritious food to conserving, restoring and protecting our nation's natural resources.

Laura Greiner coordinates The People's Garden Initiative for Iowa NRCS. "It's neat that our staff took this Initiative so seriously," she said. "These gardens were built and planted on our employee's own time, and we are grateful for their commitment."



## USDA Diversity Day: Event Scheduled for March 27 in Des Moines

Retired Pastor Rev. Greg Smith, Ph.D. and David Pope, president of North Iowa's chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), will be featured speakers at this year's USDA Diversity Day to be held March 27 at 1 p.m. in Des Moines' Neal Smith Federal Building.

This year's Diversity Day topic is accepting the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in the workplace. Smith and Pope both have gay sons. They will share their story about how that has impacted their lives in a positive way.

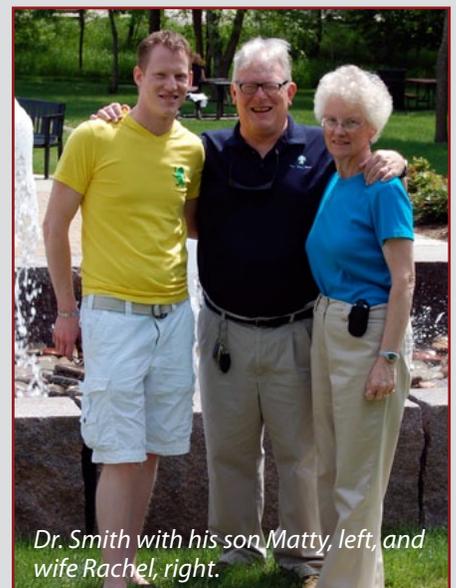
Dr. Smith spent his entire parish career in the rural Midwest, but in the 1960s he worked as a Civil

Rights worker in the South, and even served as a member of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Honor Guard at his funeral. Smith says he has the same passion for social justice issues as he does Civil Rights issues.

Mr. Pope grew up on a farm in southern Iowa. After serving in the U.S. Army he attended the University of Northern Iowa, where he met his wife, Lisa. He has worked in a variety of jobs in the Human Services field.

USDA's Diversity Day is coordinated by and available to employees of the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Rural Development (RD), and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Employees who

cannot attend the event can participate via Live Meeting. For more information about Diversity Day 2012, contact Laurel Foreman at 515-323-2291.



*Dr. Smith with his son Matty, left, and wife Rachel, right.*

## Schrodt Recognized: Newly Created Wetland Protects West Lake

District Conservationist Dennis Schrodt was recently awarded a traveling trophy by Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations Jeff Zimprich for his work in helping to complete a wetland in Clarke County that will help protect one of the county's major drinking water sources, West Lake.

Zimprich says several complications, including cultural resources, along combining several funding sources, made it a difficult project to complete. "Dennis is being recognized because of his commitment to this project long-term," said Zimprich. "This project was not one that happened quickly and everything went smoothly."

West Lake, perhaps best known as the home of Lakeside Casino, is listed on the EPA's Section 303(d) List of Impaired Waters for low levels of dissolved oxygen and high levels of Atrazine.

The landowner, John Aschenbrenner, utilized the Wetland Creation practice to dam the 23-acre pool on bottom ground along South Squaw Creek. Funding was



Clarke County District Conservationist Dennis Schrodt (right) worked with landowner John Aschenbrenner to construct a 23-acre wetland above West Lake in Osceola.

provided through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Southern Iowa Development and Conservation Authority (SIDCA), and Aschenbrenner. The land was mostly used for grazing in the past.

The wetland will filter water from 3,820 acres above it - nearly 60 percent of West Lake's 6,400-acre

drainage area. About 5,000 tons of sediment is expected to be trapped by the wetland annually.

Schrodt is now working with SIDCA to develop a monitoring program in the stream. He said he wants water tested before it enters the stream and then after it leaves the wetland.

## Slough Bill: Have Your Heard of It?

The Slough Bill (Iowa Code 427.1 [36]) is a state law that enables counties to implement a property tax abatement for prairies and wetlands.

County participation, however, is optional based on vote of the County Supervisors. Landowners should visit their County Assessor to see if their county participates, and if so, to certify their land will qualify.

Code section 9H.5 exempts lands held or acquired and maintained to protect significant elements of the state's natural open space heritage from the 1,500-acre restriction placed on such entities.

If you have questions about, please contact Jennifer Anderson-Cruz, Iowa NRCS biologist, at 515-323-2252 or your local Iowa Department of Natural Resources biologist.

## Partner News: Iowa Learning Farms Receives Good Feedback in '11

Based on evaluations received from Iowa Learning Farms (ILF) Field Days in 2011, farmers who attended are increasing conservation on their land.

Jacqueline Comito, program manager for ILF, says they held a record number of events in 2011 and are reaching more people. "We asked respondents to tell us at least one way they integrated what they learned from an event into farmer operations," she said. "Farmers who attended our field days say they put in more than 30,000 acres of strip-till or no-till.

"Over the last four years, attendees at our field days have increased their no-till or strip-till by over 60,000 acres."

Of 61 respondents to evaluations of cover crop field days, 36 percent of farmers say they used fall-seeded rye or other cover crops. Those farmers added 2,615 new cover crop acres in 2011.

"This is a collective effort of the ILF Team and our conservation partners," said Comito. "We are indeed making a difference!"



*Jeremy Gustafson holds up a bag of rye grass seed at an Iowa Learning Farm Field Day at his Boone County farm in October 2011. Gustafson aerial applied a rye grass cover crop and drilled in an oats cover crop last year.*

### New Director: Leopold Center Names Rasmussen

A microbiologist with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has been named the next director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University.

**Mark Rasmussen**, supervisory microbiologist and director of the Division of Animal and Food Microbiology at the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine in Laurel, Maryland, will begin work no later than June 1.

Rasmussen was raised on a farm in northeast Nebraska.

### ILF, Leopold Center: Partnership Strengthened

A statewide program designed to build a "Culture of Conservation" in Iowa will be working closely with the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture over the next three years.

The Leopold Center has strengthened its partnership with the Iowa Learning Farms (ILF), beginning in January and running through December 31, 2014. The Leopold Center is supporting development of educational materials for new audiences, including young people, and resources that can be used at ILF field days, workshops, classrooms and the Conservation Station, the ILF's mobile learning center.

ILF will now be able to host additional farmer activities, continue to increase the number of farmer- and non-farmer partners, and conduct evaluation sessions with mixed audiences about ILF programs. New educational materials that look at prairies, wetlands, food systems and the Iowa landscape also will be developed for youth education programs and the Conservation Station.

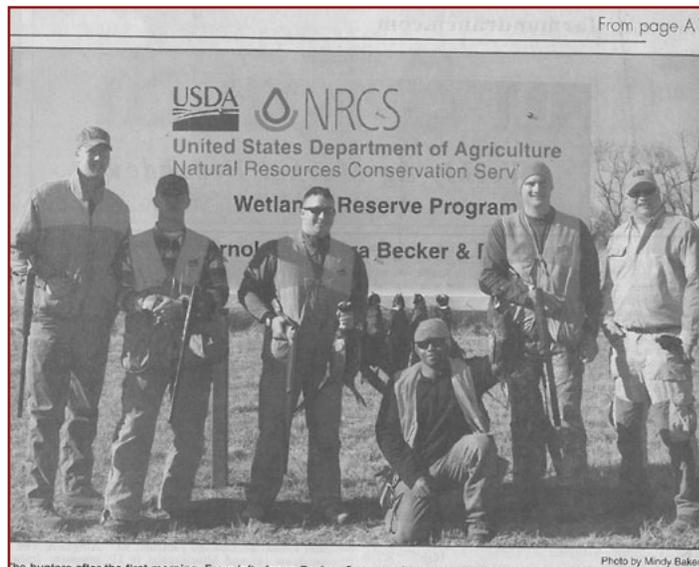
USDA-NRCS is an ILF funding partner, along with ISU Extension, IDALS-DSC, Iowa DNR and the Leopold Center. Iowa Farm Bureau and Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) are cooperating partners.

## Free Advertising: Thanks to Wounded Warrior Hunt

Four wounded U.S. Marines stationed in North Carolina took part in the first ever Lakota Wounded Warrior Hunt and Military Appreciation Event in November of last year.

One of the most prominent images from the event was taken in front of a new Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) sign in Kossuth County. The injured soldiers hunted pheasants on the WRP easement.

The goal of the Wounded Warrior program is to help soldiers wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan in their recovery and show the appreciation of the community for what these brave men have given for our freedom.



## Partner of the Year: Ducks Unlimited Honors Iowa NRCS

Ducks Unlimited (DU) awarded Iowa NRCS "Partner of the Year" at the group's State Convention Awards Luncheon at the downtown Des Moines Marriott on Feb. 11.

Eric Lindstrom, DU Manager of Programs in Iowa, says a committee of DU staff and volunteers selected NRCS for "working effectively with Iowa's private landowners and investing \$53 million in wildlife habitat conservation, soil erosion and water quality improvement during 2011."



Larry Beeler and Rich Sims from Iowa NRCS are awarded the Iowa Conservation Partner of the Year award along with Lindstrom, Becky Humphries (DU Dir. of Operations) and Kurt Dyroff (DU Dir. of Conservation Programs).

## Matt Drechsel: New ASTC-FO in West Union

Matt Drechsel began his new position this week as assistant state conservationist for field operations in West Union. Drechsel was working for NRCS in California as a district conservationist in Alturas, an area that serves both California and Nevada. For the past four months, Drechsel served as acting state resource conservationist for California NRCS.

Drechsel started with NRCS nine years ago, beginning as a soil conservationist in the Klamath Basin, and moving from there to his first district conservationist position in Bozeman, Mont.

He has a degree in Forest Management from Oregon State University, and he has completed graduate work in Range Management, Wildlife, and Natural Resource Economics.

Drechsel is married to his wife, Robin, and has two daughters (Grace, 6, and Isabella, 4).



Photo by Mark Meyer

## Changes In: NRCS Personnel

*In order of Effective Date*

Name	Title	Effective Date	Nature of Action	Location
Moore, Stephen	Soil Conservation Tech.	1/15/12	Career Cond. Appt.	Keosauqua
Peek, Jody	Soil Conservationist	1/15/12	Promotion	Williamsburg
Huitink, Nelva	District Conservationist	1/15/12	Promotion NTE	Rock Rapids
Rasmussen, Lee	Soil Conservation Tech.	1/24/12	Resignation	Estherville
Adams, Sam	District Conservationist	1/29/12	Promotion	Fort Dodge
Focht, Karla	District Conservationist	1/29/12	Promotion NTE	Creston
Paul Goldsmith	Assistant State Conservationist - Programs	1/29/12	Promotion NTE	Des Moines
Rash Daniels, Peggy	Soil Conservation Tech.	1/29/12	Reassignment	Grundy Center
Namanny, Derek	Soil Conservation Tech.	2/1/12	Resignation	Spirit Lake
Brown, Jeffrey	Soil Conservation Tech.	2/10/12	Resignation	Cherokee
Turnquist, Ryan	Soil Conservation Tech.	2/10/12	Resignation	Storm Lake
Asche, Adam	Soil Conservationist	2/12/12	Promotion	Allison
Boersma, Justin	Soil Conservationist	2/12/12	Promotion	Atlantic
Crespo-Soto, Arnelis	Soil Conservationist	2/12/12	Promotion	Centerville
Jaehrling, Valerie	Soil Scientist	2/12/12	Promotion	Atlantic
Spire, Seth	Soil Conservationist	2/12/12	Promotion	Mount Ayr

## Changes In: IDALS-DSC Personnel

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Location
Spicer, Tarrita	Administrative Assistant	New Hire (3/2/12)	Des Moines
Gillespie, Jim	Director	New Contact Information	Work Phone: 515-281-7043 Cell Phone: 515-240-2756
McGrath, James	State Technician	Retired (2/10/12)	Independence
Sitzmann, Vince	Bureau Chief	New Position (3/2/12)	Des Moines
Webster SWCD		New Office Location	1898 Kountry Lane, Suite 1 Fort Dodge, IA 50501 Phone: 515-573-4411, (same) FAX: 515-573-7447 (new)