



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

IOWA NRCS

SPRING 2024

Photo by Stacy Wickman



USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

X @IowaNRCS

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A NOTE FROM THE STATE CONSERVATIONIST

It's been over a month since our District Conservationist/Resource Team Leader statewide meeting in Des Moines, but this is the first time I've had the opportunity to address the entire state about it. Most of the feedback has been positive, indicating it was worthwhile.

In-person, statewide meetings take a lot of organizing and staff time. I want to thank the Management & Strategy staff, led by Jaime Sandoval - who was leading that division in an acting role. I also want to thank all others who helped organize and participated in the meeting. I hope everyone took away information that will help them be better employees and supervisors, and with overall career growth.

As many of you may know, Congress passed a budget for the remainder of fiscal year 2024. We are still waiting for our official state allocation, but we don't anticipate any surprises.

Conservation has strong bipartisan support and funding has been trending up in recent years. At this point, it appears likely that funding and workload will continue to be strong and our opportunity to increase the adoption of conservation is here and now.

To help offset an increasing workload, we are continuing to recruit new staff as fast as possible. I know many of our Resource Teams and field offices are understaffed. As a Leadership Team, we are trying to be strategic and fill positions in the right locations. In many cases, we are not getting enough applicants.

We are attending many college fairs across the region and trying to be creative in other ways to recruit staff. You can help, too. Take it upon yourself to promote the agency and recruit quality staff whenever possible. Sometimes, the biggest challenge is filling positions in lower population areas of the state.

As we onboard new employees, we need trained and functional staff to complete our work. Help our young staff build core skills through a combination of on-the-job and formal trainings.

I hope everyone has a good spring and enjoys getting back into the field as things begin to green up.

Sincerely,

Jon Hubbert, State Conservationist

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon H.' with a stylized flourish at the end.

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Current Developments

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

Stories and Photos

Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State Public Affairs Specialist Jason Johnson at jason.r.johnson@usda.gov. Past issues can be found at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/iowa/current-developments>.

Iowa NRCS State Office

www.nrcs.usda.gov/ia
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
210 Walnut Street, Room 693
Des Moines, IA 50309
515-284-4769

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KAYLA CREEK: PASTURELAND CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR

Southwest Area Grazing Specialist Wins National Award for “Tireless Work” to Advocate for Pastures

Iowa NRCS Southwest Area Grazing Specialist Kayla Creek was named 2023 Pastureland Conservationist of the Year at the American Forage and Grassland Council Conference on Jan. 9 in Mobile, Ala.

The award is given each year to recognize an NRCS employee who has shown outstanding service in implementing and demonstrating sound science and technology transfer on grazing land resources for NRCS customers and employees.

Steve Woodruff, NRCS Regional Agronomist at the East National Technical Support Center in Greensboro, N.C., presented the award to Creek. “Kayla is being recognized for her passion, enthusiasm and desire to educate her field office coworkers and clients to improve natural resource conservation on pasture and other grazed lands,” he said.

Creek has extensive experience in pasture management planning. She started her career in the Texas Panhandle and later worked as a District Conservationist in both Texas and Iowa.

More recently, Creek transitioned to Resource Conservationist/Grazing Specialist in the Atlantic Area Office. She is considered an expert on monitoring drought impacts on forage quality and assessing how growing conditions change over the course of the grazing season. She is considered the “go to” person when discussing the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the potential for grazing and haying options on CRP lands during drought periods.



Kayla Creek is presented her award for NRCS Pastureland Conservationist of the Year. (L-R) Steve Woodruff, NRCS Regional Agronomist at the East National Technical Support Center in Greensboro, N.C.; Creek; and Dr. Alan Franzluebbers, USDA-Agriculture Research Service Research Ecologist and VP of the American Forage and Grassland Council.

“Kayla is a tireless advocate for good pasture management and improved grazing,” says Jon Hubbert, Iowa NRCS State Conservationist. “She engages with NRCS and partner staff to help them better understand the key points with a strong focus on ‘why’ the practices and activities make sense. She has the same level of engagement with producers as she works with them to improve their grazing operations. Kayla’s passion is contagious, and her efforts are sharpening the skills of our staff and our producers as they address their pastureland conservation opportunities.”

In addition to her regular duties, Kayla assists Iowa State University Beef Extension as needed and is quick to help with any program or meeting in her area related to livestock production on pasture. She recently assisted with a Fencing and Grazing Clinic and has assisted, and recently lead, the collection of NRI Grazing Lands Data in Iowa.

FIRST IOWA FARMERS OF COLOR CONFERENCE

More than 100 Iowa farmers and agricultural leaders gathered at the Jasper Winery in Des Moines on Dec. 16 for the first annual Iowa Farmers of Color Conference, sharing resources and forming connections they say will help minority farmers succeed in the state.

Organized by Todd Western III, who farms near New Sharon and Waterloo, the conference served as an opportunity for black farmers to connect, collaborate, and learn from each other's experiences.

Western, who is one of about 70 black farmers in Iowa, said breaking down silos and connecting farmers of color was a major goal of the conference. "There aren't any formal organizations connecting Iowa's Black farmers," he said.

The conference keynote speaker was Dr. Dewayne Goldmon, Senior Advisor for Racial Equity at USDA. Dr. Goldmon graduated with a Ph.D. in Agronomy at Iowa State University (ISU) in 1991, and was a founding member and advisor of the Iowa State Minorities in Agriculture Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) student organization.

Western said he's planning to make the conference an annual event and find ways to engage the group between the annual conferences. He said he hopes Iowa's Black farmers continue to lean on the network developed at the conference.



Iowa NRCS Waterloo District Conservationist Shaffer Ridgeway (right) speaks with attendees of the Iowa Farmers of Color Conference in Des Moines. In addition to his longtime work for NRCS, Ridgeway operates Southern Goods farm in Waterloo. Ridgeway helped organize the Dec. 16 conference.



Iowa State University Extension and Outreach reported that 114 people attend the first Iowa Farmers of Color Conference in Des Moines, held Dec. 16 at Jasper Winery.

STATEWIDE NRCS MEETING FIRST SINCE 2002

For the first time in over 20 years District Conservationists and Leadership Team members gathered for a statewide in-person meeting, which also included Resource Team Leaders - who were added as part of the staff structure implemented in 2020.

The 3-day meeting was held Feb. 6-8 at the downtown Hotel Fort Des Moines.

"As a Leadership Team, we felt a meeting like this was long overdue," said Dan Paulsen, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Sioux City. "I am one of the few still working who was around to attend the last statewide meeting. These types of gatherings have many benefits on multiple levels."

About half the meeting was led by CI International, who covered topics such as "How to Work with My Style", "High Performing Teams", "The Nature of Conflict", and the DiSC Assessment.

The other half of the meeting included an NRCS Jeopardy game (won by Northwest Area), Expectations for Managers, and Line & Staff Organizational Structure. Day 3 of the meeting included five staff panels, discussing such topics as Workload Prioritization and Workload Management and Working Across County Lines.

"We discussed conducting a training like this for a few years, and I am glad we did it this year," said State Conservationist Jon Hubbert. "The upside to having a meeting like this can't be measured. I think we are making progress in being consistent in our statewide processes, and we have a lot of newer staff who will benefit from meeting and sharing ideas with veteran staff."



Michaela Hawks (left, DC in Pocahontas) and Dylan Rague (DC in Spirit Lake) take part in a communications exercise that was led by CI International on Feb. 7.



Steve Lewis (left, DC in Audubon) and Scott Eischeid (DC in Bedford) go back-to-back, taking part in an exercise that was led by CI International on Feb. 7.



TJ Mathis (left, RTL in Mount Pleasant) and Jenny Stewart (RTL in Newton) enjoy a session led by CI International on Feb. 7 at the Hotel Fort Des Moines.

SITES FROM THE 2024 DC/RTL MEETING



Top: Iowa NRCS staff pose for a group picture, standing generally where they are located on the state map. **Bottom Left:** Keith Feliciano-Cortes presents information with Courtney Myers and Missy Johnson from the State Con Advisory Committee (SCAC). **Bottom Right:** Northwest Area staff take part in personal development exercises during a breakout session.

NRCS HAS A NEW LOOK

USDA Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) agencies have a slightly new color palette and more consistent branding and logos with the unveiling of the [“FPAC Design Standards and Templates”](#) intranet site late in 2023. All logos and other items can be downloaded by employees from the new site.



New Logos

USDA agencies will be sporting similar logos for the foreseeable future. Every agency has a “lockup” logo version in color, black and white to be used on places like brochures, fact, sheets, displays, and table covers.

Alternate Logo

An alternate NRCS logo may also be used for apparel, awards and other promotional items that may require a more “block” shaped logo.



NRCS Raindrop Remains



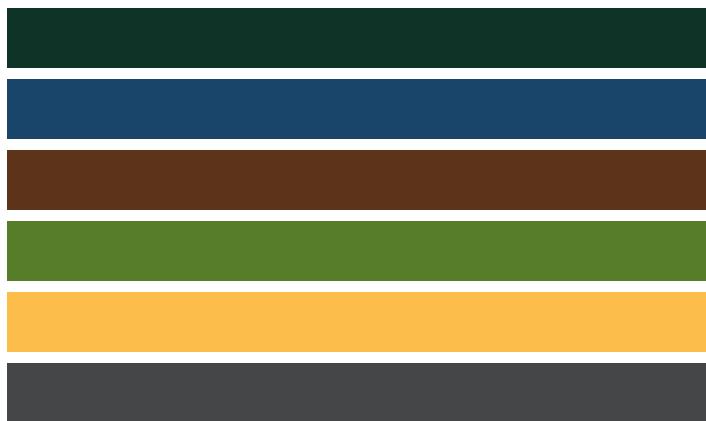
The raindrop cannot be used as a “logo” or agency identifier. However, the raindrop can be used as a graphic element on publications. The raindrop is not a replacement for the official agency logo nor

should it be used beside the agency name to appear as part of the logo.

New NRCS Colors

For the second time in eight years, NRCS will have a new color scheme. The primary lime green is gone and other shades of blue, green, gray and brown are slightly updated for 508 compliance.

NRCS Colors Palette



More Resources

The Design Standards and Templates intranet site also provides many more resources for staff, including:

- » New NRCS fonts to download
- » Letterhead
- » PowerPoint templates
- » Conference materials
- » Apparel, awards, and promotional items
- » Holiday office closure posters



EMPOWERING WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE NRCS COMMUNITY

Submitted by Jolene Bopp, Iowa NRCS Federal Women's Program Manager, Des Moines

As NRCS celebrates Women's History Month, it's essential to recognize and support the vital role women play in agriculture and conservation. This observance provides employees with an opportunity to think about how they can continue to build a community that uplifts and empowers women within the agency and in the field.

Throughout history, women in agriculture have faced unique challenges, from balancing the demands of land stewardship with societal expectations to overcoming barriers in a traditionally male-dominated field. Yet, their contributions are invaluable, bringing fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to conservation and sustainable farming practices.

Stories about some of the women making history today can be found on the NRCS Iowa website under Success Stories. These women were selected for the Iowa Conservation Woman of the Year Award. The awardees are

selected annually by the Iowa NRCS Federal Women's Program Committee. If you are interested in nominating a deserving farmer or landowner for an Iowa conservation award, visit www.cdiowa.org/recognition/awards/.

Employees are encouraged to continue fostering a culture of respect, understanding, and mutual support, to help contribute to a workplace where everyone feels valued and empowered to achieve their full potential. This involves not only acknowledging the hardships women in agriculture face but also celebrating their successes and contributions to the field. In a time when it is easy to get wrapped up in programs and deadlines or putting out fires, be sure to celebrate the successes and contributions to the team.

Some of you may have heard of Women, Land, and Legacy. Through WLL, NRCS is acknowledging the challenges women in agriculture face today. The dream is to have a WLL chapter available for women in every county across Iowa. WLL holds events and

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EMPOWERING WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE NRCS COMMUNITY

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listening sessions for women to ask questions and be heard in a comfortable environment. This organization also provides women employees an opportunity to get involved in their local communities,

meet female producers, and hear directly from them the resources needed.

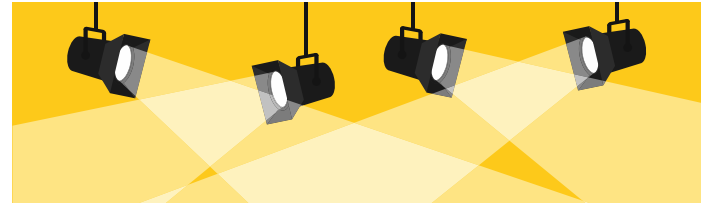
NRCS has mentorship programs available for employees who help offer guidance and support to women navigating their careers in conservation and agriculture. By sharing knowledge and

experiences, seasoned professionals can help pave the way for the next generation of women leaders in NRCS and the agricultural community. This program is open to all employees looking to get involved or receive help navigating their career with NRCS.

As we commemorate Women's History Month, let's renew our commitment to building a supportive and inclusive community for all within NRCS. The Iowa NRCS Federal Women's Program Committee extends a sincere thank you for continuing to recognize the unique challenges and contributions of women in agriculture. In doing so fosters a culture of empowerment and support that benefits all employees and the communities we serve. Together, we can ensure that NRCS remains a leader in conservation and a champion for diversity and inclusion in agriculture.



SOUTHWEST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



ABI HOEPKER



Title: Soil Conservationist (Acting District Conservationist in Clarinda)

College: Northwest Missouri State University, Bachelor's Degree in Ag Business

What other positions have you had?

I started as a district employee with Page County SWCD and was in that position for a little over 1 year. I then became a Soil Conservationist on the Red Oak Resource

Team. After 1.5 years I changed positions to the Soil Conservationist in Page County and have been in that role since July.

How did you get interested in conservation?

I was born and raised on our family farm, being involved in agriculture was and still is part of my everyday life. Growing up being involved led to me wanting to stay involved through my career. I started college not knowing where I wanted to go within the ag field. Conservation became an avenue I didn't expect to get into.

What do you like most about your job?

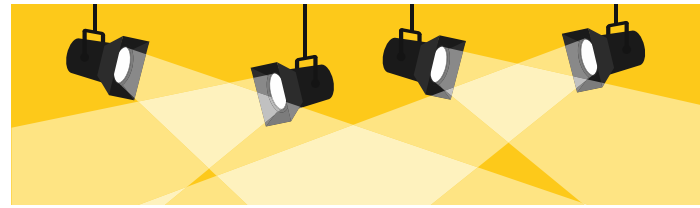
My favorite part is getting to work with producers, talking with them and learning about their farms. The relationships we build and trust gained with them to plan and complete projects are the best parts of my position.

What do you enjoy away from work?

Spending time outside. We have cattle so a lot of our "hobby" time is spent with cows! Seeing them out on green grass with growing calves is the best part of the spring. My husband team ropes, so spending time in the roping pen during the summer is a highlight. I also enjoy time at the lake soaking up the summer sun.

Any family? My husband, Tyler, and I have a black lab named Duke.

NORTHWEST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



CHRISSY RHODES



Title: District Conservationist, Jefferson

College: Bachelor's Degree, University of Northern Iowa, Biology: Ecology and Systematics, 2009; M.S. University of Nebraska-Omaha, Biology, 2012

How did you get interested in conservation?

Growing up we spent a lot of time camping

and fishing. That is where my general love of the outdoors came from. My dad also went to school for zoology and his passion rubbed off on me. My enjoyment of the outdoors made me want to be able to help sustain our natural resources for the future.

What other positions have you had?

I was a Soil Conservationist in Holyoke, Colorado, prior to coming back to Iowa. I had been a partner biologist with the NRCS in both Iowa and Colorado for 5 years.

What do you like most about your job?

The landowners and building relationships. One of my favorite things has always been getting to know and work with the producers. Seeing them have success with their goals in their operation makes me happy.

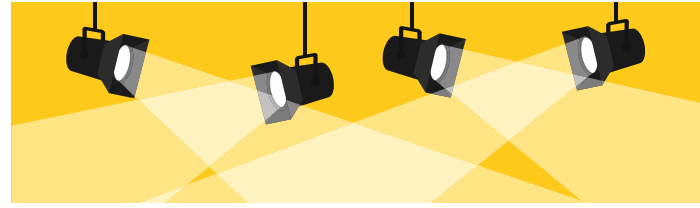
What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Fish, camping, cooking, and I recently got a metal detector so hoping to start doing that soon!

Any family?

My two sisters and parents also live in NW Iowa.

SOUTHEAST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



MACKENZIE WALTZ



Title: Acting District Conservationist, Davenport

College: Bachelor's Degree, Iowa State University, Agricultural Studies, 2021

What other positions and locations have you worked prior to this?

I started as an Earth Team Volunteer in the Tipton office during the summer of 2018. In the summer of 2019 I became an IDALS intern in the Tipton office. That fall I stayed home from college and served as a 780 technician for the Tipton office. In the summer of 2020, I became a Pathways intern for the Orange City office, then in January of 2022 I took my first full-time position as a Soil Conservationist on the Mt. Pleasant Resource Team. In July of 2023, I moved to the Soil Conservationist position in Muscatine on the Wapello Resource Team, then in January of 2024 I took the Davenport District Conservationist Detail.

Where did you grow up?

Tipton, Iowa

How did you get interested in conservation?

I got interested in conservation when I was little. We lived on an acreage south of Tipton, so there was plenty of space to run around in the hay field and through the timbers. I was very fascinated by birds and would document the comings and goings of the hummingbirds at my mother's feeders. I was obsessed with Steve Erwin and Jane Goodall growing up and thought that someday I would be studying elephants in Africa, much the same way Jane did with Chimpanzees. As I got a little older, I became more fascinated with plants and the need for conservation efforts on more of a local scale. When I was getting ready to graduate high school and applying for scholarships, I ran across the Cedar County SWCD scholarship and applied. I ended up getting it and to try to pay it forward. I became an Earth Team Volunteer for the Tipton office, which really opened my eyes to the possibilities of conservation on agricultural land.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I like that every day is a little different. There are always new people to talk to, new challenges to overcome, and there's always something new to learn.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I enjoy hiking, identifying plants and fungi, reading, crocheting, sewing, and spinning yarn.

Any family?

I currently live in Muscatine with my boyfriend, Graham, and our new puppy, Pluto. I also have two younger sisters that are still in the Tipton area along with my parents and grandfather.

NORTHEAST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



MICHELLE ELLIOTT



Title: Resource Conservationist, Decorah

College: Iowa State University, B.S. in Environmental Science, 2002

What other positions have you held?

I recently completed a 120-day detail as the Acting District Conservationist in West Union. It was a great opportunity to gain experience in a different position. I was a Soil Conservationist

on the Decorah Resource Team before my current position. Prior to NRCS, I worked for the Winneshiek SWCD, Allamakee SWCD, and Iowa DNR.

Where did you grow up?

Boone, Iowa

How did you get interested in conservation?

I grew up on a farm and always enjoyed spending time outdoors. Science was also my favorite subject in school, so pursuing a career in conservation was a natural fit.

What do you like most about your job?

I enjoy building relationships with our clients and learning about their operations and experiences. I also like the variety of responsibilities throughout the year.

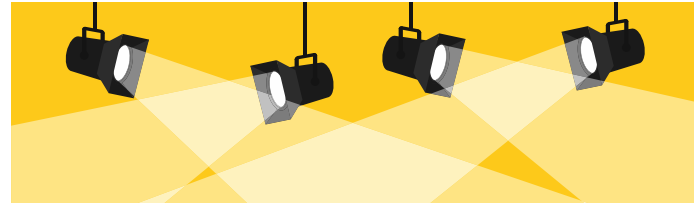
What are your hobbies?

My favorite activities are kayaking and playing volleyball.

Any family?

My husband, Chad, and I have been married for twelve years and have two sons, Garrison (10) and Fisher (8).

STATE OFFICE SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



BAILEY YOTTER



Title: State Forester, Des Moines

College: University of Missouri-Columbia,
Bachelor of Science in Forestry, 2008-2013

Where did you grow up?
Wapello, Iowa.

What other positions have you held?

Prior to this job, I worked for the National Wild Turkey Federation as an Area Forester out of the Fairfield Area Office. Before that job, I worked as a private forestry consultant for a small company in central Missouri.

How did you get interested in conservation?

I grew up playing outside and was fortunate to get a summer job with Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge near Wapello. After that, I was sold.

What are your goals for this new position?

I want to get people excited about forest management and engaging with producers to promote forest stewardship.

IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL CHANGES



Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Doepke, William	Soil Conservationist	Appointment	12/3/2023	Waterloo RT
Grimm, Hannah	Easement Programs Coordinator	Promotion	12/3/2023	Des Moines
Nelson, Dalton	Biologist - Wetland Specialist	Promotion	12/3/2023	Webster City
Schmidt, Brian	Business Services Specialist	Transfer	12/3/2023	Des Moines
Stork, Anton	Civil Engineer	Appointment	12/3/2023	Atlantic Area
Welch, Andrew	District Conservationist	Resignation	12/15/2023	Malvern
Casson, Andrew	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	12/17/2023	Oakland RT
Kestel, Jacob	Natural Resource Specialist	Appointment	12/17/2023	Newton RT
Kuhn, Kevin	District Conservationist	Reassignment	12/17/2023	Guthrie Center
Ferguson, Laura	District Conservationist	Name Change	12/26/2023	Council Bluffs
Dake, Bruce	Engineering Technician	Retirement	12/30/2023	Creston RT
Lauver, Alan	Ag Economist	Retirement	12/30/2023	Des Moines
Meyer-Dideriksen, Tanya	State Outreach Coordinator	Retirement	12/30/2023	Des Moines
Schutt, Mark	Resource Team Leader	Retirement	12/30/2023	Tipton RT
Townley, Gregory	Resource Team Leader	Retirement	12/30/2023	Indianola RT
Baxter, Edmond	Civil Engineer	Resignation	1/5/2024	Fairfield Area
Christian, Carolyn	Business Services Specialist	Retirement	1/13/2024	Des Moines
Gronemeyer, Dean	Resource Conservationist	Retirement	1/13/2024	Spencer RT
Rash Daniels, Peggy	Civil Engineering Technician	Retirement	1/13/2024	Webster City RT
Couchman, Troy	District Conservationist	Promotion	1/14/2024	Corydon
Netz, Lauren	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	1/14/2024	Algona RT
Turner, Jennifer	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	1/14/2024	Epworth RT
Iwuchukwu, Obinna	Natural Resource Specialist	Appointment	1/28/2024	Williamsburg RT
Smith, Virginia	Natural Resource Specialist	Appointment	1/28/2024	Tipton RT
Steele, Dallas	Soil Conservation Technician	Promotion	1/28/2024	Red Oak RT
Street, Nancy	Admin. Support Assistant	Appointment	1/28/2024	Sioux City Area
Koopmeiners, Tresajo	Soil Conservationist	Appointment	2/11/2024	New Hampton
Van Laren, Grace	Soil Conservationist	Appointment	2/11/2024	Sibley RT
Wiest, Benjamin	Soil Conservationist	Appointment	2/11/2024	Sibley RT

RT = Resource Team

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Yotter, Bailey	State Forester	Appointment	2/11/2024	Des Moines
Goode, Katrina	Soil Conservationist	Name Change	2/20/2024	Newton RT
Macemore, Leigh	Soil Conservationist	Appointment	2/25/2024	Williamsburg RT
Skaar, Joshua	Soil Conservationist	Appointment	2/25/2024	Newton RT

IDALS-DSCWQ PERSONNEL CHANGES



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF
**AGRICULTURE &
LAND STEWARDSHIP**

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Mims, Jill	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	12/22/2023	Calhoun SWCD
Nerland, Debra	Conservation Assistant	Resignation	1/1/2024	Hamilton SWCD
Kohn, Dylan	State Technician	New Hire	1/5/2024	Cherokee SWCD
Schloss, Kelly	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	1/19/2024	Marion SWCD
Harter, Emily	State Technician	New Hire	1/19/2024	Marion SWCD
Schulte, Nicole	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	1/19/2024	Lyon SWCD
Juarez, Jesse	State Technician	New Hire	2/2/2024	Page SWCD
Williams, Abbie	Mines & Minerals	New Hire	2/9/2024	Central Office
Thompson, Sarah	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	2/16/2024	Cerro Gordo SWCD
Vonnahme, Keith	State Technician	New Hire	3/1/2024	Carroll SWCD