



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

IOWA NRCS
FALL 2025



USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

 @IowaNRCS

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A NOTE FROM THE STATE CONSERVATIONIST

After a very challenging year and a 43-day furlough, I just want to start by thanking you all so much for your hard work this year. It is good to be back working and serving Iowa farmers after the shutdown.

Despite the many challenges we faced, we still had a great year planning conservation systems and implementing practices utilizing Farm Bill programs and state cost-share. Since the DRP, it has been an “all hands on deck” approach to getting the work accomplished. I appreciate your job flexibility and willingness to work harder and longer for the agency.

Moving on to Fiscal Year 2026, we have our full budget allocation already in place, so we are fully funded with no threat of being furloughed between now and Sept. 30, 2026.

Since we have been away from the office and our customers for a while, I want us to focus on reconnecting with our farmers. Restore communications with them as best as possible. Let them know we’re in the office and ready to get back to helping them achieve their conservation goals.

Lastly, I am not sure all of you have heard Chief Aubrey JD Bettencourt’s priorities for this year and beyond. Here is a general list of her focus right now:

- » Staff in the field more working with farmers, ranchers and foresters.
- » Improve internet connectivity in our offices.
- » Modernize our field tools.
- » Streamline our work processes, including the One Farmer, One File initiative.
- » Programs will focus on narrow and deep, meaning more emphasis on our core conservation activities and our mission.
- » Partnerships will be reengaged as a force multiplier to maximize greater conservation success across the nation.
- » Agreements with partners will focus on helping NRCS implement conservation, instead of outreach to gain more customers.
- » Recognize farmers for the good conservation work they are doing and the environmental benefits they are providing.
- » Support farm innovation and precision agriculture.

I hope everyone has an enjoyable Thanksgiving this week, and a happy holiday season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon Hubbert". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Jon Hubbert, State Conservationist

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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>.

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WHAT'S GOING ON WITH WOMEN, LAND AND LEGACY?



By Casey Gathje, Outreach Coordinator

Women, Land and Legacy is picking back up as Federal staff are returning from the shutdown.

The State Team plans to meet next month to start working on events and ideas for the new year. Local chapters are working on rescheduling events that were planned for during the shutdown; be sure to check the WLL Facebook page and [website](#) for updates of rescheduled and new events.

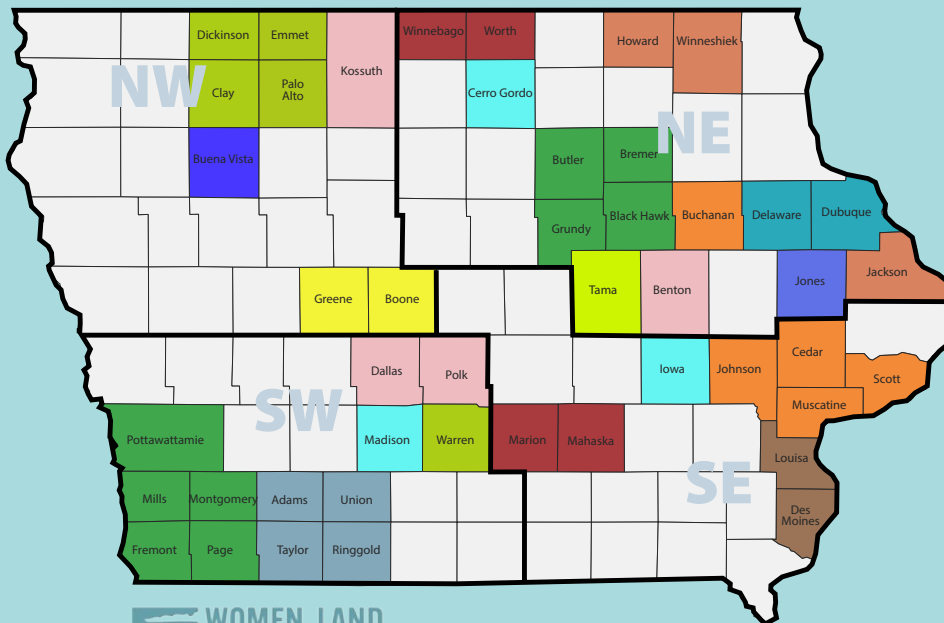
Three new chapters are in the works of getting started over the next few months. Several

chapters are planning their winter events, so check out Facebook and our website for dates and locations!

Is your chapter hosting an event? Be sure to send me the information so it can be promoted. If your county or resource team is interested in starting a WLL chapter or have any further questions about the organization, please contact Casey Gathje at casey.gathje@usda.gov. The website is still under construction, but feel free to visit <https://womenlandandlegacy.org/> as well as our Facebook page.



Women, Land and Legacy Teams



November 2025

2025 CDI ANNUAL CONFERENCE: RESILIENT STEWARDSHIP

Although NRCS had far fewer staff attend the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) Annual Conference, Aug. 24-26, our presence was still felt.

The 79th annual conference theme was *Resilient Stewardship: Cultivating Conservation for Tomorrow's Challenges*.

Through an agreement with CDI, NRCS provided information from two exhibitor booths at the event held at the Gateway Hotel and Conference Center in Ames. "It's always good to hear feedback from commissioners and to pick their brains about conservation delivery in Iowa," said Jason Johnson, NRCS state public affairs specialist, who serves on the conference planning committee.

Additionally, State Conservationist Jon Hubbert was the Keynote Speaker on Aug. 25, which provided the perfect opportunity to discuss NRCS' 90th anniversary. Hubbert presented information about NRCS' early years following the Dust Bowl and the role Hugh Hammond Bennett played in the development of our agency. Hubbert also interacted with the audience with a handful of trivia questions and gave information about current NRCS activities.

On the second day of the conference, Hubbert gave attendees a general NRCS update, covering topics like Farm Bill programs, staffing, and budget.



Iowa NRCS State Conservationist Jon Hubbert was the keynote speaker at CDI's 79th Annual Conference on Aug. 25 in Ames.

To end the conference, State Outreach Coordinator Andrew Thomason and Resource Conservationist Maggie Syverson presented information on ways NRCS can assist small scale, urban and organic farmers in Iowa.

The 2025 Annual Conference was the last event for outgoing CDI President Jeri Thornsberry, who served two years. "Despite the real challenges we face—from climate impacts to shifting policies—our work endures because it's rooted in a responsibility to the land and future generations," she said. "Every acre conserved and partnership built strengthens our collective resilience."

Commissioners selected Sean Dolan as the next CDI President and T.C. Loving as Vice President.

GUIDELINES FOR POSTING INFORMATION IN FEDERAL BUILDINGS

Several NRCS offices have recently been asked by non-governmental organizations to hang flyers or posters in their offices to help promote an event or program. USDA Service Centers are required to follow the rules governing federal buildings.

Sometimes, the line of what is allowed to be displayed and what is not is a little gray for NRCS and our partners. Here is some information to help clear up some gray areas:

- » It is generally OK to post information about NRCS or other federal government agency, Soil and Water Conservation District, or Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship programs and activities.
- » Posting information for a more “extended” partner is also generally OK if NRCS is a cosponsor.
- » If a partner is charging for an event, or if it is not a core NRCS partner and we are not cosponsoring the event or program, it is generally advised not to post materials.

Examples of what **would generally be allowed**:

- » A more extended NRCS partner wants to post information and put project fact sheets on the counter to promote their RCPP-AFA project.
- » Practical Farmers of Iowa would like to post a flyer promoting their upcoming local field day, in which NRCS is a cosponsor.

Examples of what **would generally not be allowed**:

- » The local co-op would like to post information in your field office about cover crop seed sales.
- » Practical Farmers of Iowa would like to post information in your field office about their cost-share program.

Guidance for Posting and Distributing Materials (41 CFR 102-74.415)

All persons entering in or on Federal property are prohibited from:

- a. Distributing free samples of tobacco products in or around Federal buildings, as mandated by Section 636 of Public Law 104-52;
- b. Posting or affixing materials, such as pamphlets, handbills, or flyers, on bulletin boards or elsewhere on GSA-controlled property, except as authorized in § 102-74.410, or when these displays are conducted as part of authorized Government activities; and
- c. Distributing materials, such as pamphlets, handbills or flyers, unless conducted as part of authorized Government activities. Any person or organization proposing to distribute materials in a public area under this section must first obtain a permit from the building manager as specified in subpart D of this part. Any such person or organization must distribute materials only in accordance with the provisions of subpart D of this part. Failure to comply with those provisions is a violation of these regulations.

RATHBUN RCPP A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP

For decades, Iowa NRCS has helped local leaders protect Rathbun Lake in southeast Iowa. As the water source for Rathbun Regional Water Association's (RRWA) water treatment plants, keeping the lake clean from nitrates and phosphates is vital.

The latest partnership between the Rathbun Land and Water Alliance (RLWA) and NRCS is a Regional Conservation Partnership Project (RCPP) with a goal of helping to reduce sediment loads that cause water quality impairments in Rathbun Lake. The project runs 2024-29.

NRCS and RLWA are not the only partners involved in the project. According to Scott Cagle, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships for Iowa NRCS, the project includes necessary work on Army Corps of Engineer land and since NRCS almost always implements conservation on private lands, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) is helping to implement practices on Army Corps property.

"This is a special project for many reasons, but primarily because of the impact we're making across such a large watershed and also because of the public-private partnership involved," said Cagle. "I think the Corps has been surprised at how well we all work together here in Iowa to get conservation practices on the land."

The project encompasses portions of six southern Iowa counties, including Appanoose, Clarke, Decatur, Lucas, Monroe, and Wayne Counties. The Rathbun Lake Watershed covers about 354,000 acres.

Practices eligible for adoption through this RCPP project include cover crops, grade stabilization structures, grassed waterways, grazing management, sediment basins, terraces and water and sediment control basins.

NRCS is offering more than \$7 million in financial assistance through the life of the project and RLWA is providing about \$3.8 million.



During a project tour on Sept. 11, partner leaders look at a newly constructed sediment basin. Picture L-R: NRCS State Conservationist Jon Hubbert, Appanoose County District Conservationist Bradley Gardner, Lucas District Coordinator Brian DeMoss, RRWA Support Services Officer Marty Braster, and IDALS Watershed Coordinator Velvet Buckingham. (Photo by Scott Cagle)



A wide angle of the newly constructed sediment basin on Sept. 11 in the Rathbun Lake Watershed. (Photo by Scott Cagle)

SWITCHGRASS CROPPING SYSTEM RCPP COMPLETES SECOND SUCCESSFUL YEAR

The first Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project in Iowa with customer contracts through an Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA) completed its second consecutive successful year in Fiscal Year 2025.

The goal of the project is to improve carbon sequestration, soil health, and reduce nutrient runoff, while also improving farm profits in 19 southern Iowa counties by developing a Climate Smart Switchgrass Cropping System.

The project objectives are to:

- » transition at least 5,000 acres of sensitive traditional row crop acres and degraded pastureland to the native, warm-season switchgrass;
- » develop an alternative biomass market that could bolster economies and provide ecological benefits;
- » and increase farmer net income on targeted pasture and marginal row crop acres.

In Fiscal Year 2025, the project totaled 178 contracts, obligating nearly \$1 million for practices to seed and manage switchgrass, such as seeding, no-till, herbicide applications, mowing, and micro-nutrients.



State Conservationist Jon Hubbert (left) tours Jack Bensink's (middle) Marion County farm, which includes switchgrass through the new RCPP project in southern Iowa. Bensink is a longtime advocate of wildlife habitat and farm diversity. Conservation Biologist John Murphy (right) helps manage the project. (Photo by Scott Cagle)

Above: State Conservationist Jon Hubbert (right) inspects a switchgrass field in southern Iowa on Aug. 28 with project coordinator John Murphy, a conservation biologist. (Photo by Scott Cagle)

SPRING VALLEY GREAT HOST FOR IOWA NRCS GOLF OUTING

For the second time in the last eight years Spring Valley Course near Livernore in Kossuth County hosted the Iowa NRCS Golf Tournament. About 30 NRCS employees, conservation partners, friends and family member gathered on Aug. 22 for the annual event.

The course has been popular for the NRCS tournament over the years. "The owners do a great job with outings," said District Conservationist Brian Tumey, who organized the event this year. "When you play here, you know it will be a well-organized tournament."

Retired Marshall County District Conservationist Dana Holland and his son, Brett, shot -7 (65) for first place in the 2-person scramble format. Dana Holland is the winningest participant in the tournament's history, which dates back to the 1980s.

State Public Affairs Specialist Jason Johnson and his golf partner Eric Boyle finished in second place with a -5 (67). "Going in, I thought one or two under par might win it, but it was a beautiful day and everyone was playing well," he said. "Even though it's a bit of a drive, I enjoy coming up here to play. The course is always in great condition."

Look for details early in 2026 about the next Iowa NRCS Golf Tournament.



Dana Holland (right) and his son, Brett, are all smiles after winning the Iowa NRCS Golf Tournament at Spring Valley Golf Course in Livernore on Aug. 22.



FABULOUS FIELD PHOTOS!



Field Photos

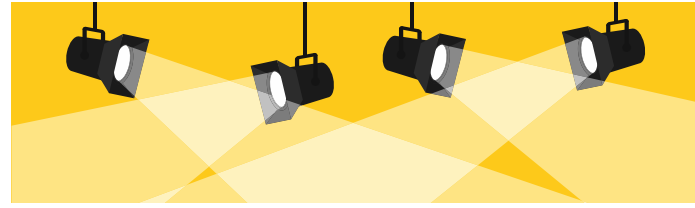


1. A young student looks intently at a soil health water infiltration test at the Clay County Fair on Sept. 12. Since the county fair is after the start of the school year, students in northwest Iowa are often able to spend a school day at the fair. (Casey Gathje, Des Moines)
2. A winding grassed waterway helps prevent ephemeral gully erosion in Adair County. Soil Conservationist Krista Council shot this picture in April as the corn begins to take off. (Krista Council, Greenfield)
3. Resource Conservationist Michelle Elliott snapped this picture on Sept. 4 of a monarch butterfly sharing a thistle with a yellow bumblebee in a CP43 prairie strips seeding. (Michelle Elliott, Decorah)

Thank you to those who submitted photos. For the next Current Developments, submit images at: https://usdagcc.sharepoint.com/:f:/r/sites/nrcs_iowa/PA/Shared%20Documents/Photo%20Submission?cs-f=1&web=1&e=aKVs9q.



NORTHWEST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



KRISTI SILVERTHORN



Title: Resource Conservationist, Sioux City Area Office

College:

- » Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids 2011-2014, Associate of Science Degree.
- » Iowa State University, 2014-2016, Bachelor's degree in Animal Ecology with an emphasis on Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences and a minor in Biology. I was a member of the ISU Forestry Club and a competitor in Timber Sports.
- » Western Iowa Tech Community College, 2016-2017, Continuing education in agronomy.

What other jobs have you had?

After college, I started my career in Le Mars as a Watershed Coordinator for the Plymouth Soil and Water Conservation District in October of 2016. In October 2019, I was hired by the NRCS as a Soil Conservationist in Sibley, and transferred back to the Le Mars Field Office as a Soil Conservationist in May of 2020. I took a temporary 120-promotion as the Woodbury County

District Conservationist in 2023. In May 2024, I accepted my current position as the RCPP Resource Conservationist at the Area Office in Sioux City.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Conesville—a small town in southeast Iowa, as the middle child with two sisters. I graduated from Columbus Community High School in Columbus Junction in 2011. Growing up, I spent a lot of time outdoors hunting, fishing, and exploring the outdoors with my family. Being the middle child taught me how to balance different perspectives, and those outdoor experiences really shaped my appreciation for nature.

How did you get interested in conservation?

Conservation has always been a big part of my life as I have always been drawn to the outdoors. I saw firsthand how important healthy ecosystems are and those experiences sparked a curiosity that grew into a commitment to protecting natural spaces and wildlife. Throughout college, I had internships with the Iowa DNR-Aquatic Invasive Species Program, the Water Quality Bureau and volunteered at the Wildlife Care Clinic at Iowa State, which helped me figure out exactly what I wanted to do.

What do you like most about your job?

I enjoy getting out to meet with producers and discuss what we can do to improve their land while meeting their specific goals. The one-on-one conversations out in the field are what make the job the most enjoyable.

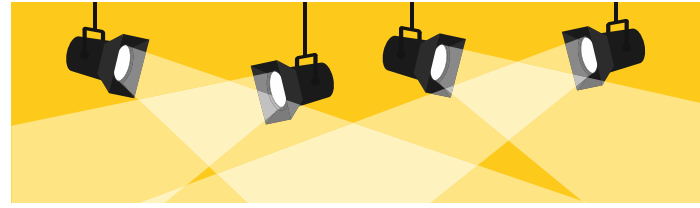
What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

I enjoy spending as much time outdoors as I can—fishing, hunting, hiking, and gardening are some of my favorite hobbies. I also love spending time with my husband, children, and our dogs. On the lighter side, I enjoy visiting local breweries, photography, motorcycle rides and cheering on the Kansas City Chiefs and Iowa Hawkeyes. Those hobbies give me a good balance between staying active, family time and having fun.

How about your family?

I am happily married to my husband, Tyler, a Project Manager II for Eocene Environmental Group. We have two children, Mason (7) and Charlotte (4), and two rescue dogs, Rocky and Albert.

SOUTHWEST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



MARGARET HENDERSON



Title: Administrative Support Specialist for SW Area (Atlantic), and I assist the NE Area where I can.

College: Iowa State University with a degree in Design. (Graduated from ISU so long

ago that the concrete was still wet at the new football stadium and it didn't even have a name yet!).

Where did you grow up? I grew the youngest of 5 kids on a 75-head Jersey dairy farm in Cass County, along with a farrow to finish operation. After my dad stopped milking, he switched to a cow-calf operation.

What other positions have you had?

I worked for Spahn & Rose Lumber company in Dubuque after graduation from Iowa State. I also worked for Walnut Grove Feed and had my own swine production software business for several years before going to work for USDA Rural Development in 1998. I wasn't very busy at that job and when Bonnie Weller left this position in 1999, I naively asked Jeff Zimprich if I applied for and got the AMA job, would I have plenty to do and keep busy? With a straight face he replied that he didn't think that would be a problem – an understatement I'm still feeling the effects of 26 years later.

How did you get interested in conservation?

I like experimenting with conservation in my garden and grow cover crops and no-till.

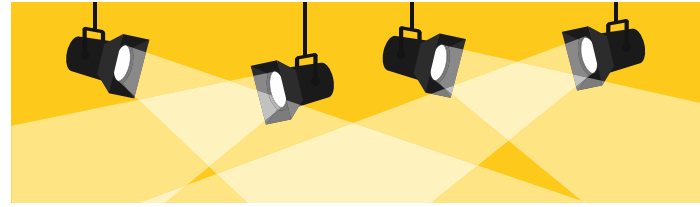
What do you like most about your job?

I've been very fortunate to work with amazing people in this position and had opportunities to do challenging projects and details which I really enjoy - from the creation of the RAGBRAI postcard outreach; working on competitive sourcing; a 120-day detail to Idaho during the last shutdown; to working on the national RCPP and CSP improvement efforts. There is a lot of variety in what I get to do every day, and it's never, ever boring.

What do you enjoy away from work?

I spend most of my free time gardening and volunteering at my church in the sound booth doing media and whatever else is needed.

NORTHEAST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



NICHOLE STANSBERY



Title: Civil Engineering Technician, Vinton Resource Team (Benton, Buchanan, Linn and Tama Counties)

College:

- » Ellsworth Community College – Associate Degree in Liberal Arts
- » Upper Iowa University – Bachelor of Science Degree in Conservation Management

Where did you grow up?

For the first part of my life, I grew up in Haverhill. Then, my family moved to Traer, and for the last 20 years we've been in Traer.

What other positions have you held?

I worked for Poweshiek County SWCD as a District Employee and 780 Employee from November of 2018 to May of 2020. Then, I started working for the NRCS for the Vinton Resource Team as a Soil Conservation Technician from June of 2020 to October of 2023. I transitioned to my current position as the Civil Engineering Technician.

How did you get interested in conservation?

When starting college, I was planning on becoming a psychologist. My adviser at the time signed me up for Field Biology course & Iowa Vertebrate Ecology course and I fell in love. I loved being outside learning about different wildflowers of Iowa, going on hikes, and learning about mammals and birds found in Iowa and what type of ecosystem they need to survive in our area.

What do you like most about your job?

The main things I like most about my job are my coworkers. I also enjoy the engineering aspect of my job, trying to find ways to improve the land through different engineering practices.

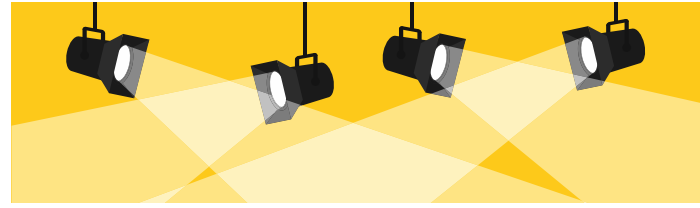
What are your hobbies?

I enjoy hanging out with family and friends. My other hobbies are golfing and playing pepper.

Any family?

My Husband and I have been married for 5 years. We have two amazing/crazy children: Juliet (3 years old) and Nolan (7 months).

SOUTHEAST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



ERIC PEITZ



Title: District Conservationist, Washington Field Office

College:

- » Kirkwood Community College, 1997-1999, Associate of Applied Sciences-Parks and Natural Resources (1999)
- » Iowa State University, 2002-2004, Bachelors of Science Horticulture -Environmental Option (2004)

Where did you grow up?

I am originally from Mt. Pleasant in southeast Iowa and spent a lot of time in my childhood in the outdoors hunting and fishing on family farms in Lee County, Van Buren County and Henry County.

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

I began my NRCS career in 2005 as a Soil

Conservation Technician and have served in other roles including Soil Conservationist, Resource Conservationist, and have served in my current role as District Conservationist since 2012. My career has taken me to 3 of the NRCS regions with a little over half of my career in the West region, primarily in CA, where I worked for 8 years. I have also spent about 7 years in the Midwest in IA, IL, NE and my most recent stint was serving as District Conservationist in Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties in FL. I served as Acting District Conservationist for Palm Beach and Broward Counties for the last year and a half before my move back to IA. In addition, I had an opportunity to serve 2 details in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. I feel blessed in my 20+ years with NRCS to have had the opportunity to work in a diverse number of settings and meet and work with a broad spectrum of customers and employees across the country.

How did you get interested in conservation?

From a young age I had a passion for the outdoors and conservation after a stint serving on AmeriCorps project with the IADNR in the late 90s and working for Pioneer Hi-Bred during my summers at Iowa State. Following my graduation, I learned more about NRCS and felt it was a good career path for me.

What do you like most about your job?

I enjoy working with customers and getting to know their operation and what their goals are and if we can help them. I also enjoy working as a team and seeing employees move up in the agency and achieve their career goals.

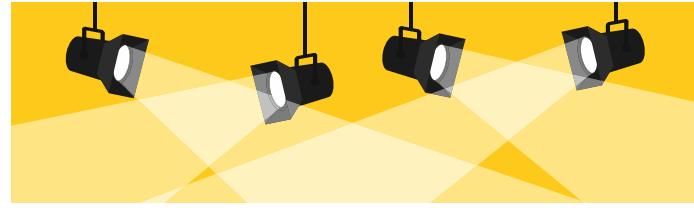
What do you like to do in your free time?

In my spare time I enjoy the outdoors as much as possible and enjoy hunting, fishing, hiking, gardening, and traveling.

Any family?

My wife Karen and I have 2 boys Michael and Matthew and a daughter Lily, they keep us busy outside of work.

STATE OFFICE SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



JULIA SYLVIES



Title: Agricultural Engineer, Des Moines (State Office)

College: Iowa State University, Class of 2021, Agricultural Engineering

Where did you grow up? I grew up in Edwardsville, IL, which is near St. Louis. There was a treeline separating my backyard and a bike trail that was covered in large

amounts of honeysuckle. I loved smelling and eating it during the summer. I'm pretty sure looking back it was the invasive kind and it now makes sense why my parents kept trying to get rid of it.

What do you like most about your job?

I love meeting with landowners and doing survey work. I enjoy hearing the stories landowners have about their property and surveying gives me some of the most beautiful views in the state.

What other positions have you held?

I spent 4 years in the Orford Field Office (NRCS) in NH and a summer internship with the Paris Field Office (NRCS) in TX.

How did you get interested in conservation?

I was a Girl Scout Camp Counselor and spent summers outdoors teaching young women the importance of conservation. That experience made me want to make a career out of it.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I enjoy swimming, musical theatre, and needlepoint.

Any family?

My dad is a federal employee and my mom is a public school teacher, so I am happy to continue the family tradition of public service.

IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL CHANGES



Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Decker, Brittany	Resource Conservationist	Resignation	7/12/2025	Fort Dodge RT
Kestel, Jacob	Soil Conservationist	Resignation	7/25/2025	Indianola RT
Griffith, Hunter	Biologist	Name Change	7/27/2025	Atlantic Area
Money, Matthew	Civil Engineer	Resignation	8/22/2025	Atlantic Area
Sylvies, Julia	Civil Engineer	Reassignment	9/7/2025	Des Moines
Mulick, Benjamin	Program Assistant	Promotion	9/21/2025	Wapello RT
Peitz, Eric	District Conservationist	Reassignment	9/21/2025	Washington
German, Michelle	Resource Team Leader	Reassignment	10/5/2025	Vinton RT
Pothoven, Andy	District Conservationist	Reassignment	10/5/2025	Nevada

RT = Resource Team

IDALS-DSCWQ PERSONNEL CHANGES



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF
**AGRICULTURE &
LAND STEWARDSHIP**

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Overton, Tristen	State Technician	New Hire	April 2025	Jackson/Jones SWCD
Peterson, Ron	State Technician	Retirement	July 2025	Monroe SWCD
Trees, Lisa	Conservation Assistant	Resigned	July 2025	Butler SWCD
Casey, Ashley	Conservation Assistant	Resigned	Aug 2025	Winnebago SWCD
Claman, Molly	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	Aug 2025	Guthrie SWCD
Davis, Carman	State Technician	Resigned	Aug 2025	Carroll SWCD
Gibson, Emily	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	Aug 2025	Dallas SWCD
Gillespie, Bobbie	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	Aug 2025	Adams SWCD
Balk, Josh	Urban Conservationist	New Hire	Oct 2025	Central Office
Harter, Emily	State Technician	Resigned	Oct 2025	Marion SWCD