



United States Department of Agriculture

# IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Spring 2018

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NATURAL RESOURCES  
CONSERVATION SERVICE  
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# a **Message** from the **Acting State Conservationist**



Jon Hubbert,  
Acting State Conservationist

## **Workload Cycle Time Study Will Measure Field Level Work Products**

It is my honor to be serving as your Acting State Conservationist while Kurt Simon completes an important detail as Acting Senior Policy Advisor for our new USDA Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Under Secretary, Bill Northey.

The topic that I am highlighting today is very important to the future of our agency. NRCS is conducting a nationwide workload assessment called "Workload Cycle Time Study" which directly involves 13 field offices in Iowa. The study will capture the time it takes to complete our field level work products. The selected offices will be asked to provide extensive information during the assessment period. Better estimating our workload and staffing needs across the Nation is critical, as we seek to help the Department, Congress and the public better understand the staffing and financial resources needed to accomplish our mission. It is also critical to our NRCS leadership as we develop future workload and staffing.

As you know, our work products are not as uniform as "widgets" produced on an assembly line, and the time needed to produce them varies, based on many factors. By collecting data from a broad cross-section of our offices and staff, we can develop better time estimates for completing our workload. NRCS has selected Accenture Federal Services, LLC to help quantify time spent per work product and perform analysis on the data to identify NRCS staffing needs based on field level workload.

This comprehensive assessment will help NRCS make more informed decisions about staffing, program prioritization, and the total cost of executing programs. Participants will be asked to record actual time to perform tasks daily for two pay periods. A support team will help respond to questions.

Have a great spring! I look forward to getting out and seeing as many of you as I can.

Sincerely,  
Jon Hubbert, Acting State Conservationist

## **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 Crowell at [laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov](mailto:laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov). Past issues can be found at [https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ia/people/employees/nrcs142p2\\_008273/](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ia/people/employees/nrcs142p2_008273/).



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## **PARTNERSHIP DAY: DOZENS MEET WITH LEGISLATORS FOR CONSERVATION**



Iowa NRCS joined its statewide partners to support conservation efforts during Partnership Day at the State Capitol in Des Moines on March 12.

The Conservation Districts of Iowa, Soil and Water

Conservation Districts, and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship host the annual event to promote current conservation projects and to show how additional funding will benefit Iowa landowners.

Many commissioners and other local representatives meet with their local legislators to show ongoing projects, illustrating how conservation funding is put to good use.



*State Conservationist Kurt Simon is interviewed by David Geiger from the Iowa Agribusiness Report at Partnership Day at the State Capitol in Des Moines on March 12.*

## **ALSO AT THE CAPITOL: PETERSON PRESENTS SOIL HEALTH INFORMATION TO LEGISLATORS**



Iowa-Missouri Regional Soil Health Specialist Doug Peterson presented information and demonstrations for the Iowa House Ag Committee on Feb. 27 at the State Capitol.

Peterson's presentation was an abbreviated version of the one he typically uses for farmers, but he was able to show how no-till soils respond better to water compared to tilled soils in a Slake Test.

Legislators seemed impressed and asked several questions about the water infiltration test, comparing no-till and tilled soils.

Legislators just a month prior passed Senate File 512, committing \$282 million to water quality initiatives.



*Regional Soil Health Specialist Doug Peterson (standing) begins his soil health presentation to Iowa House Ag Committee members by showing them the soil stability test/Slake Test on Feb. 27 at the State Capitol.*

## CIG SUCCESS: PFI PROMOTES USE OF SMALL GRAINS IN ROTATIONS

*Submitted by Judy Martinson, Resource Conservationist, Partnership Team, Des Moines*

Agriculturalists have long understood the importance of crop rotation to boost soil fertility, break pest and disease cycles, and improve overall sustainability. There was a time in the not-so-distant past when small grains such as oats, rye and wheat were critical components of the rotation cycle. More recently, the corn-bean rotation has become the standard rotation and the use of small grains has been eliminated or reduced in most rotation cycles. In addition to losing the soil benefits of a diversified rotation, producers also lost their knowledge about how to successfully grow these crops.

In partnership with NRCS, through the award of both an Iowa and a National Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG), Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) is working on a small grain marketing pilot that will study the barriers and opportunities for small grains rotations and support producer adoption and awareness of the agronomic, economic and conservation benefits of small grains rotations.

A critical part of the project involves recruiting producers through a cost-share program for adding a small grain/legume year to a corn and soybean rotation. In 2017, 8 producers signed 325 acres up for the program. Additional producers have signed up for the 2018 growing season. An educational program kicked off the 2017 season with the pilot participants learning about variety selection. Mac Ehrhardt of Albert Lea Seed let the group through the process of selecting the best small grain for each operation. To learn more about his recommendations, go to: <http://www.practicalfarmers.org/blog/2017/01/12/small-grains-variety-selection-kicks-off-shared-learning-call-series/>. Producers and market participants share in monthly learning calls which focus on topics from variety select to best management practices to successfully finding an end-market. The calls average 30 - 60 participants on each call.



Outreach to subject-experts and industry leaders is also an important part of the project. On June 27-28, 2017, PFI and Sustainable Food Lab co-hosted 43 representatives from major food and beverage companies in Ames to attend a learning journey about the sustainability benefits and supply chain needs of extended crop rotations. Twenty-six companies including Mars Petcare, McDonalds, PepsiCo, and Unilever attended. On August 17, a group of 11 researchers from 6 states in the upper Midwest attended a kick-off meeting for the Midwest Extended Rotation Council (MERC) to further identify gaps in crop rotation research. A Midwest Small Grain Conference was also held in 2017.

While this project is still in its beginning phases, PFI has made great strides in promoting diversification of cropping systems. In post-event evaluations, 79% of producers at small-grain focused field days were considering changing production practices as a result of what they learned at the event. For additional information about this project, email Alisha Bower at [alisha@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:alisha@practicalfarmers.org).

## A WONDERFUL TRIBUTE: CONSERVATION PARK TO BE DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF BRAD HARRISON



*Submitted by Denise Forret,  
Conservation Assistant,  
IDALS-DSCWQ*

A conservation park will be dedicated in memory of former Iowa NRCS District Conservationist Brad Harrison, who passed away

in April 2017 after battling cancer.

Thanks to a partnership of the Dallas County Conservation Department, City of Adel, United Brick & Tile, and numerous volunteers, Brad's vision for a conservation education area for Adel's trailhead is becoming a reality.

A ceremony dedicating a miniature wetland, an Iowa native arboretum, and a blooming Iowa prairie will take place at the Raccoon River Valley Trailhead in Adel on April 22, 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.

### **About Brad**

Brad worked for NRCS for 36 years; 30 of those years in Dallas County. He was a passionate and creative conservationist who never gave up on a good idea for selling conservation. Brad wrote and successfully pitched his idea for a national NRCS agency tagline, "Helping People Help the Land". And that is what Brad did. He helped people help the land.

His promotions were innovative and reached out to all ages. He created a soil health rap song and music video called: "Don't Treat It Like Dirt". Because of Brad's passionate and persistent enthusiasm, he successfully recruited a team of talented volunteers who performed, recorded, produced, and wrote the music for his rap lyrics. Every person donated their time and resources to his project. The video has been viewed nearly 7,500 times on YouTube and downloaded by teachers around the country.

Brad also created a team of natural resource conservation superheroes called The Whobuddies.

After creating the Whobuddies concept, Brad reached out to countless movie production companies and animation studios to see if they could help bring his band of six owl superheroes to life. After receiving at least one "cease and desist" letter from a well-known animation studio, which sternly, yet politely asked Brad to stop contacting them, he didn't give up. He redirected his energies, and found his own illustrator to give Bubo, Otus, Tyto, Strix, Ninox and Asio their visual personalities. (Always the educator, he named the characters after the actual genus name of each owl species.) With Brad's influence, Iowa NRCS has developed posters, trading cards, a board game and has recently released his fourth Whobuddies comic book and video. The Whobuddies resources have been shared with school children all across the United States. You can search for "Whobuddies" on the web or stop in the local office to pick up your own copies.

Brad was a tireless advocate of the soil, launching his newest soil health promotion idea in March of 2017. Called the "1% Challenge", his local project encourages farmers to work towards a 1 percent increase in soil organic matter through soil health practices.

But Brad was much more than a persistent conservation promoter. He was a seasoned and skilled conservation planner, a trusted resource for local farmers and a selfless mentor to young NRCS employees. He felt strongly that getting out in the field and developing a trusting relationship with farmers was key to getting conservation on the land. He was a kind, generous and encouraging friend. Brad's daughter Megan wrote, "My Dad was the hardest working man I've ever known and an amazing husband, father, son, brother, grandpa and friend. He had the best attitude, even in his weakest moments. My hope is that he is never forgotten and always honored for that he accomplished in his beautiful life." This is our hope, too.

# BACK IN THE DAY

## Iowa NRCS Engineers



**Civil Engineer Jean Sandstrom - State Office**



**Engineering Technician Jim Gibbs - State Office**

If you have historical Iowa NRCS pictures you would like to share in Current Developments, please forward them to Jason Johnson at [jason.r.johnson@ia.usda.gov](mailto:jason.r.johnson@ia.usda.gov), or 210 Walnut Street, Room 693, Des Moines, IA 50309.

## STATE OFFICE REMODEL: STAFF MOVES FLOORS TEMPORARILY

The Iowa NRCS State Office is undergoing an office downsize and remodel at their Neal Smith Federal Building location.

About 50 staff members are temporarily relocated to a vacant third floor office space until the sixth floor remodel is complete. The sixth floor remodel is expected to take at least three months from start to finish.

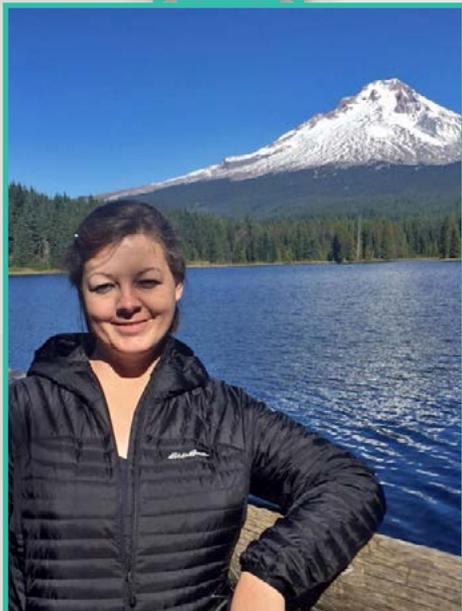
When completed, the office will have a totally new configuration with staff members located in different areas from before. The remodel will include new carpet, cubicles, offices, meeting rooms, mailroom, breakroom, and conference room. The office will also include new features such as small telephone booths for private calls and 2 treadmill working stations.



With less storage space offered after the remodel, State Office staff have been busy packing and de-cluttering their work areas.

**EMPLOYEE  
SPOTLIGHT**

**Jenny  
Stewart**



Jenny Stewart

**Title:** Resource Conservationist, Albia (Mahaska, Monroe, Appanoose, Davis and Wapello Counties)

**College Education:**

» Bachelor's Degree: Animal Science, 2004, Iowa State University

**Career**

I started my career in 2005 as a Soil Conservationist in Oskaloosa in the Career Intern Program. In 2008, I became a Soil Conservationist in the Fairfield Field Office. In 2015, I became the Resource Conservationist in the Albia Field Office.

**How Did You Become Interested in Conservation?**

I grew up on a farm outside of Newton, and conservation was always something that was important to

my family. It was often a topic of conversation. I became interested in working for NRCS after I had the opportunity to do some job shadowing and also spent some time as an Earth Team Volunteer. I was able to go out to the field and help with some surveying, design check-outs, status reviews, etc.

**What is your favorite part about working for NRCS?**

My favorite thing about my job would be the people I work with—both my co-workers and the farmers that I work with. I also enjoy being able to go out to the field and see conservation out on the land.

**Is there a special mentor or person who has influenced your career?**

I have had a lot of people who have influenced my career and who I have learned from over the years, but if I had to pick one person who has influenced it the most I would probably say Barb Stewart, who was the State Agronomist for many years, and who retired last summer.

As many people know, she is also my Mom. I remember going out to the field with her when I was little and she was a District Conservationist at the Newton Field Office. One time when I was 8 or 9 she took me along to do status reviews and showed me how to measure crop residue. The farmer was there that day planting and he gave me a ride in his planter. I loved being outdoors and spending time with my Mom. She had a lot of knowledge from her many years of service and was always willing to share

that with me when I started my career. I am thankful I can still take advantage of her knowledge even though she's retired now.

**What do you like to do in your free time?**

I like spending time outdoors. My family has a farm in Jasper County and raises Suffolk Sheep. I love spending time with the lambs this time of year. I also have a Morgan horse named Sedona and I enjoy trail riding. I'm looking forward to some warmer weather so I can get back to riding again.



# [SPOTLIGHT VIDEO]

## How to Describe & Sample Fragments in The Field

A video job aid called “How to Describe and Sample Fragments in the Field” is now on [YouTube](#) that explains sampling and describing rock, pararock, and other fragments in the soil as well as how to determine and describe the quantity of fragments in the soil on a volume and weight basis using National Cooperative Soil Survey methods and references. The video is about 15 minutes in length.



## IMPROVING EFFICIENCIES: CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Iowa NRCS entered into an agreement with Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) to more efficiently, thoroughly and safely monitor conservation easements by using Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS).

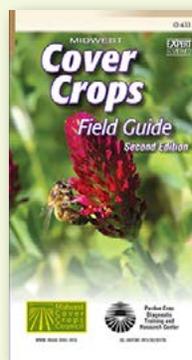
The project addresses a need identified by NRCS State Easement Programs Team staff to improve monitoring of difficult to access easements, increase safety of NRCS field staff, and allow for more efficient and effective monitoring during all seasons and conditions, thereby extending the period of time available to NRCS staff and partners to complete easement monitoring. Monitoring with the UAS began April 5 in Bremer County. The project will include 25 selected easements covering at least 2,500 acres representing a variety of easement conditions and to evaluate the benefits of drone use and applicability for future monitoring.

On-site photos will be taken, and with the geo-referenced drone the still photos can be taken at the required photo points and kept with the monitoring data. Video can be saved and shared with participating landowners. UAS' are not used on any landowners' property without the landowner written permission. NE Iowa RC&D has a licensed UAS pilot that will follow the guidelines established with that

protocol. Videos may be shared with the landowners as well.

“As budget and staffing gets tighter we need to be more creative in our processes, and the use of UAS may show efficiencies,” said Sindra Jensen, easement programs coordinator.

## MOBILE APP: MIDWEST COVER CROP FIELD GUIDE



The popular Midwest Cover Crops Field Guide is now available as a mobile app for iPhone and Android. You can access all the same great information available in the pocket guide, on your phone or tablet! Additional photos were added to the app, as well as links to other useful information.

The app can be downloaded for free, but to access all of the information, you will need a \$2.99 annual subscription. You will be prompted to renew your subscription one year after your purchase date.

It is available for download from the [App Store](#) or on [Google Play](#). The printed field guide will continue to be available through the [Purdue Extension Education Store](#).

## COLLEGE OUTREACH: YOUNG ALUMS RETURN TO MARYVILLE

Iowa NRCS ventured out of state to attend the Northwest Missouri State University Career Day on March 8 in Maryville, Mo.

Amanda Shetler, soil conservationist in Creston, and Jeremy Barnes, soil conservationist in Audubon, are both NWMSU graduates and represented Iowa NRCS at the event, along with Public Affairs Specialist Jason Johnson.

Many juniors and seniors visited the NRCS booth with interest in soil conservation positions, and several freshmen and sophomores were interested in the Pathways program.

Northwest Missouri State is located about 20 miles south of the Iowa border, near Bedford, and attracts a large population of Iowa high school students.



Amanda Shetler and Jeremy Barnes visit with a Northwest Missouri State University student interested in a career in soil and water conservation.

## AGRIBUSINESS SHOWCASE: IOWA NRCS TALKS 4R PLUS

Iowa NRCS was one of a handful of organizations partnering to kick off and promote the 4R Plus campaign at The Agribusiness Showcase & Conference at the Iowa State Fairgrounds Varied Industry building on Feb. 14.

[4R Plus](#) involves using precise 4R nutrient management and conservation practices to provide nutrients when the crop needs them and to enhance soil health and improve water quality. The goal is to achieve a more productive crop now and in the future.

At the Showcase, the Iowa ag industry's innovation and technology are showcased through featured speakers, industry education, and exhibitors.

Workshops and the showcase floor exhibits are for everyone in the agricultural industry. Each year the Showcase & Conference attracts more than 1,100 visitors ready to see the latest technology, make new connections, and attend one of the many educational sessions.



Promoting the 4R Plus campaign and conservation planning at the Showcase were Lance Porter (left), SC in Winterset, and Seth Spire, DC in Greenfield.

Lance Porter, soil conservationist in Winterset, and Seth Spire, district conservationist in Greenfield, represented Iowa NRCS during the one-day exhibiting opportunity.

## WOODBURY FIELD DAYS: FOUR ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

*Submitted by Christine Evans, District Conservationist, Woodbury County*

Woodbury County held 4 Soil Health Round table sessions in communities across Woodbury County this winter, Feb. 16 and 23, and March 2 and 9.

The purpose of the sessions was to bring producers interested in improving soil health on their farms together with producers experienced in implementing soil health practices.

Experienced producers shared videos and photos of their farms and the practices that they are implementing with the beginners. NRCS staff provided tabletop soil health demonstrations, and explained the science behind the soil health movement.



Area 1 Agronomist Mike Henderson talks to a group of farmers about soil health in Salix, IA.

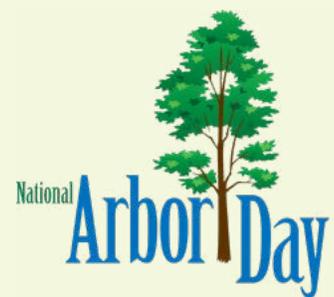
## CELEBRATION: HONOR THE ENVIRONMENT THIS MONTH

April and May are popular months for celebrating special days that honor our environment.

In April, we begin with Earth Day on April 22, followed by National Arbor Day on April 27.

We end the month with the beginning of Soil and Water Conservation Week, April 29 - May 5. The theme for Soil and Water Conservation Week is "Watersheds: Our Water, Our Home."

Please email pictures and event information to the Public Affairs staff ([jason.r.johnson@ia.usda.gov](mailto:jason.r.johnson@ia.usda.gov)) so we can share details and images on Twitter, and in the next edition of Current Developments.



## 2018 OMNIBUS BILL: PRODUCERS, LANDOWNERS NO LONGER NEED DUNS NUMBER OR SAM REGISTRATION

Producers and landowners participating in NRCS conservation programs will no longer need a Dun and Bradstreet Universal Number System (DUNS) number, or be actively registered in the System for Award Management (SAM).

The changes were made in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 (2018 Omnibus Bill).

"[DUNS and SAM] were designed for billion-dollar government contractors, not everyday farmers trying to support their families," said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue in a March 22 statement. "I thank Congressional leaders and I look forward to passage of the omnibus containing these extremely important provisions and other items supporting rural America and agriculture."

The DUNS/SAM change is effective immediately. All NRCS websites and outreach materials are currently under review and will be updated as reviewed.

The exemption does not apply to any agreements or federal contracts with eligible entities, project sponsors, vendors, partners, or other participants that are not exempt landowners or producers.

**The following will still need to meet applicable DUNS/SAM registration requirements:**

- » Partnership agreements entered through the



Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

- » Agreements under the Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) component of ACEP.
- » Partnership agreements under the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) component of ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE).
- » Watershed operations agreements with project sponsors.
- » Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) agreements with a project sponsor, including Recovery and Floodplain Easements.
- » All cooperative, contribution, interagency, or partnership agreements of Federal contracts used by NRCS to procure goods or services.

To help transition to the new regulation, additional resources will be available soon to help manage the required changes.

## DRESS FOR SUCCESS: TRANSMIT A PROFESSIONAL IMAGE

With warmer weather approaching, this is a reminder for all of our staff to dress professionally for work, whether you are in the office or out in the field.

### **Dress professionally to match the occasion**

NRCS generally has an office dress code policy that is professional business casual. However, you should and are responsible to dress properly for the occasion. Your office, work environment and supervisor will influence your dress style. Always be neat and clean in whatever you choose to wear. Clothing should be clean and free of rips, tears,

or holes. Your dress style will project a positive or negative image about "you". You broadcast a message in what you wear.

Shorts, short skirts, crop tops, t-shirts and caps with advertising, etc. are not appropriate dress.

We suggest you make an accurate statement in your appearance and transmit a positive, professional image at all times. Remember that your dress is a reflection of you and the Agency.

## 2018 IOWA NRCS GOLF TOURNAMENT



Mark your calendars for Friday, August 24, 2018, as the date for the annual Iowa NRCS Golf Tournament. This year's tournament will be held at Spring Valley Golf Course near Livermore. The format will be an 18-hole, 2-person best shot format outing, starting at 9 am. A meal and prizes will be included as part of the registration. Friends, family, retirees, and conservation partners are all welcome to participate in this event. More information about the course is available at [www.springvalleygc.com/](http://www.springvalleygc.com/). Email Brian Tumey at [brian.tumey@ia.usda.gov](mailto:brian.tumey@ia.usda.gov) for more details.



## 2018 SCS/NRCS RETIREE SUMMER PICNIC UPDATE

Chris Knudsen and Jody Christiansen are in the planning stages for the 2018 retiree picnic. We are considering July for the picnic but still need to make arrangements. So, mark your calendar for this summer. We hope to get the details out later in May.

### Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Gibson, Douglas	Soil Conservation Technician	Retirement	1/31/18	Newton
Madison, Elizabeth	Student Trainee	Resignation	2/17/18	Sidney
Holcombe, Kevin	Civil Engineering Technician	Retirement	3/2/18	Adel
Kaufmann, Lindsey	Student Trainee	Resignation	3/2/18	Clarion
Pronschinske, Matthew	Student Trainee	Resignation	3/10/18	Jefferson
Harris, Aris	Soil Conservationist	Transfer to Army Corps of Engineers	3/17/18	Atlantic Area
Brady, Benjamin	Soil Conservationist	Converted to Career Cond Appt	3/18/18	Le Mars
Sande, Aaron	Soil Conservationist	Converted to Career Cond Appt	3/18/18	Newton

### Changes In IDALS-DSCWQ PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
McDonald, Barb	Soil Conservation Technician	Resigned	2/22/18	Madison/Warren SWCD
Wos, Ashley	Environmental Engineer/ Construction Observer	New Employee	3/23/18	Central Office