



United States Department of Agriculture

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Spring 2019

LATE WINTER FLOODS
DEVASTATING TO WESTERN IOWA

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WINTER COFFEE SHOP TALKS

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NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE
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a **Message**

from the

State Conservationist



Kurt Simon,
State Conservationist

Iowa Flooding

The last couple months have been difficult for many Iowans. My heart goes out to those affected by the devastating floods along the Missouri River and other parts of the state. Along with our partner agencies, we will do what we can to help the flood victims in the 61 Iowa counties that have received the Presidential Major Disaster Proclamation.

Reorganization Update

After submitting our reorganization preproposal in December, the Chief approved. It was reviewed by the USDA Office of Human Resources, Budget Office, Office of General Counsel, and the Office of Congressional Relations. And the first week of April, Under Secretary Bill Northey and USDA Secretary Sonny Purdue signed our preproposal.

We now enter the second phase of our reorganization process: the 1010 package. During recent meetings, Under Secretary Northey asked that we complete our 1010 within 30 days. This will be a heavy lift. But under that time-frame, we should start implementing our approved reorganization plan during mid-summer.

One of the many decisions we will need to make while finalizing our 1010 is where every employee will work in our new structure.

Everyone will have a position with the same grade and in the same series, but your supervisor, duty station and area of coverage may all change.

Hopefully you had a chance to attend one of the 25 update meetings this month. We received lots of great questions and thoughtful feedback. Based on what you learned during these meetings, it's very important that you share with your supervisor and/or AFO about your personal preferences for your future position in the new structure. This input will be used as we finalize our 1010 package during the next several weeks. We will do our best to accommodate people's preferences while still meeting the agency's needs.

Once the 1010 is approved, everyone will receive a letter providing details about their place in the new structure. No one should be surprised about the contents in their letter. I am expecting supervisors to personally communicate with all employees before we send employees letters.

As shared during our meetings, this is a multi-year process that will provide many opportunities for promotions and new responsibilities. While change can be difficult, we are fortunate to have been able to design the future changes we are facing together. This is one of the many benefits of Iowa NRCS taking a proactive approach versus a reactive approach that many other states will face with in the near future.

Sincerely,
Kurt Simon, 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. Past issues can be found at https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ia/people/employees/nrcs142p2_008273/.



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MARCH FLOOD DEVASTATION: UNDER SECRETARY NORTHEY VISITS SW IOWA COMMUNITIES

by Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist

I had the opportunity to tour flood-ravaged areas of northwest Missouri and southwest Iowa at the end of March with USDA, state and local agricultural groups. Less than two weeks after waters from the Missouri River and its tributaries flowed over banks toppling and damaging many levees, thousands of farmland acres and portions of several small towns were still underwater.

USDA Under Secretary of Agriculture for Food, Production and Conservation Bill Northey and other USDA leaders joined state level agricultural staffs from Iowa and Missouri to meet with farmers, landowners and residents from affected communities, March 28-29.

USDA representatives from NRCS, Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA) and Rural Development (RD) viewed the damage, heard flood victim stories, and discussed ways USDA can help in the recovery.

Northey told farmers he hopes USDA can help “soften the blow” in their recovery efforts.



USDA Under Secretary Bill Northey (right) talks to corn-soybean farmer Andy Spiegel on March 28 about the flood damage sustained on his Missouri cropland. Spiegel farms in northeast Missouri and southwest Iowa. (Photo by Jason Johnson)

Why did these areas flood?

Most residents in the upper Midwest states were happy to see the calendar turn to March following two months of grueling weather to start the year. A combination of record snowfall and cold temperatures blasted the area from early January to early March.

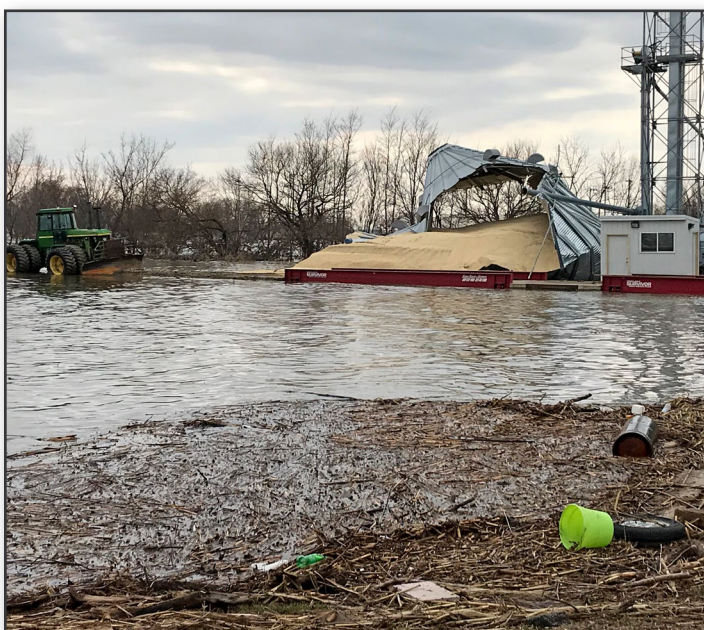
On March 3, temperatures remained in the single digits or below zero for daytime highs throughout the region, with much of the ground covered in more than a foot of snow. Then, temperatures began rising – QUICKLY. By March 13 temperatures rose to as high as 60 degrees in Council Bluffs.

Typical spring temperatures and rainfall followed, which melted the snow and caused ice jams in the Missouri River and its tributaries. The weekend of March 16-17 water began to flow out of river banks in eastern Nebraska, and floodwaters hit Iowa river towns, like Missouri Valley and Hamburg, along Interstate 29 on March 18.

Agricultural Flood Damage

A sampling of the major damage farmers are facing:

» Thousands of flooded row crop acres. As much as



12 feet of water is creating lake-like conditions on farms along the Missouri River and its tributaries. In some cases, water flowed over levees and is not receding back to the river. In those instances, planting a crop this year will be difficult or unlikely.

In northwest Missouri, Northey and company visited Spiegel Farms where Andy Spiegel has about 2,000 cropland acres and farm buildings submerged in floodwaters near the small town of Watson. Spiegel said he's never seen a flood like this one. "We've never had a flood this time of year. This is unknown territory for us," he said.

- » **Livestock deaths.** Goats, sheep, hogs, cattle and other livestock struggled to stay alive as water quickly flooded pastures and barns. Livestock deaths in Nebraska-alone number in the hundreds of thousands.

When I toured, some animals were still trapped in buildings or pastures that were only accessible by boat or air. Near Percival, Iowa, Jeff Jorgenson

with J-Six Enterprises showed us how his company is feeding hogs trapped in two 2,500-head hog barns surrounded by floodwaters by delivering 50-pound bags on air boats.

Many livestock producers lost their hay feed in the floods, and many unaffected farmers in the region donated hay to those in need.

- » **Damaged grain bins leave grain useless.** In many cases, farmers had already contracted with local elevators to sell the grain stored in their bins. Now, they must repay businesses for the contaminated grain they can't sell. Flood damaged grain is useless and will have to be destroyed and properly disposed of, costing local farmers millions.

We met with producers in Hamburg to talk about the impacts of losing grain to damaged storage bins. Many of them said they just recently recovered financially from the 2011 floods, and now they face another major setback.

What can NRCS do to help?

Like Northey said, we can't make everything better for farmers, but we will do what we can. Below are some NRCS programs to help flood-affected farmers:

- » **Emergency Watershed Protection Program – EWP** offers vital recovery options for local communities. Projects funded address erosion related watershed impairments, such as debris removal, damaged road culverts or bridges, reshaping or protecting eroded banks, correcting damaged drainage facilities, repairing levees and structures, or reseeding damaged areas.
- » **Environmental Quality Incentives Program – EQIP** is not a disaster program, but it can play a role in assisting producers in natural disaster recovery. Through EQIP, farmers can install conservation practices such as stream bank restoration, grassed waterways or buffers that prevent excessive soil erosion caused by a natural disaster.

Top Left: Along with about 2,000 cropland acres, Andy Spiegel's Watson, Missouri, farm sustained damage to buildings and machinery. Spiegel also farms ground across the border near Hamburg.

Bottom Left: Just east of the Interstate 29-Highway 2 interchange near Percival, cropland lies underwater nearly two weeks after the first waters flooded the area.



FRIGID START TO THE YEAR:

FIELD OFFICES CHALLENGED DURING RECORD COLD, SNOW



Instead of starting off with a bang, 2019 started with a shiver. And by early March, shoveling, plowing, dodging winds and white knuckling it on ice-covered roads were the norm across Iowa.

If you thought January, February, and even the early part of March seemed colder and snowier than normal, it wasn't your imagination...they were!

Des Moines was just tenths of an inch from breaking a 40-day record for snow. February was the snowiest on record in the Capital city with 25.1 inches, about 17 inches more than normal. Mason City finished February with nearly 30 inches of snow, also a February record. It snowed 30.7 inches in Waterloo throughout February, a whopping 23 inches more than normal.

On Feb. 23, when temperatures raised above freezing, it rained...a lot. Many cities, including Cedar Rapids, broke daily rainfall records. Cedar Rapids had 0.87 inches of rain, breaking the record of 0.61.

January, overall, was barely colder than normal but the last week in January was a doozy! On Jan. 31, Dubuque broke a record low high temperature at -16 degrees. They also broke the daily low temperature by seven degrees with a morning low of -31 degrees. Dubuque barely missed breaking its all-time cold weather record low of -32, set Jan. 7, 1887.

What did the inclement weather mean for Iowa NRCS field offices? The extreme cold and snowstorms caused many NRCS field offices to delay opening, close early, and in extreme cases close for the day.

Below are some pictures Iowa NRCS staff took dealing with the elements this year:



Doug Adams took this picture at his farm in north central Iowa.



Denise Freeseaman shows the huge snowdrifts at her north central Iowa acreage.



Doug Adams with work to do to get his government vehicle cleared for safe driving.



Deanna Rohrer shows that the snow could even look pretty sometimes.

COFFEE TALK: SOIL HEALTH TALKS SUCCESSFUL DESPITE COLD

An estimated 200 people including farmers, technical service providers, and landowners attended one of eight Soil Health Coffee Shop Talks throughout Iowa in late January and early February hosted by Iowa NRCS and Soil Health Specialist Mike Hubbs.

Hubbs, who now resides in Tennessee, served in various capacities with NRCS during his Federal career. He was a national level agronomist, Kentucky State Conservationist, and Division Director for Ecological Sciences and Financial Assistance Programs before retiring in 2013. Iowa NRCS contracted with him in 2018 to help train staff and provide information to Iowa farmers about the benefits of farming with a focus on soil health.

The meetings were held indoors, Jan. 28-31, during a week marred by some of the coldest Iowa temperatures in years. Locations ranged from college research farm classrooms to ISU Extension conference rooms to local producer equipment sheds.

The meeting in Marble Rock was postponed to Feb. 11 due to the weather conditions. Despite weather obstacles across the state, local staff reported “very good” turnouts. “We feel we had great success for the cold weather conditions,” said Jason Steele, NRCS soil scientist in Fairfield.

Hubbs and local NRCS staff led the meetings but encouraged sharing of ideas and information between farmers. “We were aiming for something different from our traditional field days, where NRCS staff do most of the talking,” said Rick Bednarek, Iowa NRCS state soil scientist. “We wanted farmers to do most of the talking and sharing of experiences.”

NRCS staff began the “coffee shop talks” by using demonstrations, such as the Slake Test and Infiltration Test, to show the benefits of keeping the soil covered and contained with roots. Staff also reviewed the five principles of soil health:

- » Keep the soil covered as much as possible.
- » Disturb the soil as little as possible.
- » Keep plants growing throughout the year to feed the soil.



Southwest Area Resource Soil Scientist Julie McMichael performs a Slake Test for a group of interested farmers at the Soil Health meeting in Winterset on Jan. 28.

- » Diversify as much as possible using crop rotations and cover crops.
- » Integrate livestock into your system.

Hubbs emphasized to Iowa farmers that soil health is difficult to build, hard to maintain, and easy to destroy. He said farmers need to “put the same emphasis on cover crops as they do cash crops” to be successful improving soil health.

Cover Crops A Popular Topic

Julie McMichael, area resource soil scientist in Atlantic, said farmers at the meetings she attended in Winterset and Red Oak had good discussions about cover crops. “It was good to see producers sharing tips on planting multi-species cover crops and the timeline of nutrient payback,” she said. “I think producers liked the format of the meetings. It was a good open format for networking.”

Steele said he had great conversations following meetings in southeast Iowa about the soil health concepts discussed. “(The meeting format) allowed farmers to ask questions and communicate amongst each other in a small group,” said Steele. “Several landowners have called me since the meetings and asked great questions about their system and how it can be improved.”

Tips for Future Meetings

McMichael says one of the challenges in talking to groups about soil health is the varying level of soil health knowledge and experiences farmers have. “Try to stay at a level of discussion that is understandable to all levels,” she said. “Make sure you are explaining things to those individuals who haven’t done much with soil health and want to participate in the discussion.”

McMichael added that having a good balance between sticking to the planned agenda and allowing for good, in-depth conversation on important topics is vital. “Sometimes it is hard to stay tied to the planned agenda when there is a good flow of

conversation,” she said. “But it is important to stay on track.”

“It’s also important to leave extra time at the end of the meeting for discussion,” said McMichael. “This is when many producers were loosening up in our meetings, and then we had to stop discussion because we were out of time.”

The next step is for NRCS staff to hold “shovel talks” in the field when the weather warms up. Shovel talks are intended to be more hands-on planning discussions. “We want our staff to be able to provide good recommendations to local farmers to help them improve the health of their soils,” said Bednarek.

Mike Hubbs talks about soil health to farmers in Hubbard on Jan. 30.



Southeast Area Soil Scientist Jason Steele talks to a group of farmers at the soil health talk in Wapello County on Jan. 31.

BACK IN THE DAY

JULY 2005 - FAYETTE COUNTY



In 2005, Iowa NRCS and our conservation partners installed permanent conservation practice signs along the RAGBRAI route. In this photo taken July 11, 2005, NRCS and local conservation partners put up a Contour Buffer Strips sign at Richard Jensen's farm in Fayette County.

In the photo are: (L-R) former NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Jim Wolfe, Jackson County District Conservationist Lori Schnoor (Cresco at that time), landowner Richard Jensen, retired NRCS Resource Conservationist Duane Miller, and local watershed coordinator Neil Shaffer.

**EMPLOYEE
SPOTLIGHT**

**Dan
Mohn**

Title: Soil Conservation Technician,
Decorah Field Office

College Education:

Bachelor's Degree:
Biology/Wildlife Ecology, 2009,
Iowa State University

Career

After graduating from ISU, I was hired on as a wildlife technician with the Iowa DNR at the Wildlife Research Center in Boone. I spent a year working under the Upland game Biologist assisting with various studies and surveys with the goal to increase upland game populations and improve habitat in Iowa.

In the Spring of 2010, I was hired on as a Soil Conservation Technician at the Decorah Service Center. Nine years later and I'm still implementing conservation practices in scenic Winneshiek County.

How did you become interested in conservation?

I always knew I wanted to pursue a career in the natural resource field and the NRCS presented a great opportunity to work outdoors on a wide variety of conservation practices. I really enjoy being able to help landowners and producers



Dan Mohn

manage their natural resources.

The 'Driftless Area' offers a unique blend of crop ground and timber which creates many different conservation practice options on the landscape. By providing technical assistance, we can focus on any resource concerns they may have and come up with ideas to better their situation. It's a great feeling when a landowner or producer can't thank you enough for the time and effort we put in as NRCS employees to assist them making an area of concern into an area they are proud of on their property. Being able to move back to my home area near my friends and family in the far NE corner of the state was definitely a bonus as well.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up on the banks of the Mississippi River in Lansing, Iowa. Although I didn't grow up on a farm, I spent many hours as a kid on my uncle's farms in the hills of Allamakee County. My siblings

and cousins would help around the dairy operation as kids feeding calves, bailing and stacking hay, but mostly getting in the way and causing trouble. If I wasn't doing that, I was enjoying the outdoors either hunting, fishing or playing baseball, basketball or football.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

Outside of work you'll find me taking full advantage of the 'Driftless Area' aka 'God's Country' by hunting or fishing every opportunity I can get. My dad got me into the outdoors a lot as a kid and that passion is as strong as ever. I enjoy hunting deer, turkeys, waterfowl and even take an occasional big game hunting trip out west.

From April – October you'll find me spending countless hours on the Mississippi River enjoying my other job/hobby: tournament bass fishing. Fishing competitive bass tournaments is a real passion of mine, they are fun to do and can even be profitable if you're catching bigger bass than everyone else.

Family

Married in 2016. My wife, Melissa, and I still reside in Lansing and are expecting our first child in August 2019.

The Science of Soil Health: Going Deeper

Want access to more water and nutrients? Look deeper, expert Dr. Ray Weil tells farmers. The scientist who wrote the book on soils wants farmers to look deeper. Literally.

Dr. Weil, author of the 15th edition of *The Nature and Property of Soils*, wants farmers to consider the soil's nutrient and water-holding capacity below the top 8-10 inches of soil.

Unfortunately, decades of heavy machine traffic on the soil's surface, combined with tillage, have created nearly impenetrable layers of dense soil called "plow-pans," which make it difficult (if not impossible) for most crops to reach what Weil describes as a tank of moisture and nutrients below the topsoil.



To access those nutrients and moisture, farmers should consider using cover crops to tap into that reservoir with plow-pan-busting roots, he says. Go underground with Dr. Weil in this Science of Soil Health video to learn more. It's science you can really dig.

CURRENT AND FORMER NRCS STAFF: HELPING WOMEN CARE FOR THE LAND

Soil Conservationist Heidi Ackerman (Dallas County) helped the Women Food & Ag Network (WFAN) with their recent *Women Caring for the Land* Iowa Spring Meeting on April 3. This year's meetings focus on soil health. Ackerman was actually one of three NRCS staff members to help with the meeting.

WFAN Team Member Jean Eells said Heidi did a fabulous field tour. "We spent the morning at Brenton Arboretum conducting one of our soil health meetings under an Iowa NRCS Conservation Collaboration award to our lead partner Prairie Rivers of Iowa," she said. "We are promoting conservation plans by Julie Falcon (retired NRCS) to the women landowners who attend."

The next Women Caring for the Land meeting is in Forest City on April 24, followed by May 1 in Iowa City, and Cedar Falls on May 2.

"The primary goal for our soil health meetings is, in addition to explaining soil health principles, to give the women a chance to get to know their local natural resource people and what the agencies have to offer," said Eells.

For more details about the spring meetings, visit <http://www.wfan.org/iowa-spring/>.



NRCS Soil Conservationist Heidi Ackerman talks to women on a bus tour of Dallas County on April 3 during a Women Caring for the Land meeting.

NORMAN FRIEDRICH: NRCS NOMINEE FOR TOP FEDERAL ENGINEER

NRCS recently selected Norman Friedrich, P.E., Civil Engineer, with the Iowa NRCS in West Union as the agency's nominee for Federal Agency Engineer of the Year (FEYA). Friedrich was one of 32 finalists for the award which was announced Feb. 22 at the National Press Club in Washington DC.

The competition, sponsored by the Professional Engineers in Government Practice Division of the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE), recognizes Federal engineers for their professional accomplishments and civic contributions.

Typically, the honor is reserved for a current employee, either civilian or military, who is either a licensed professional engineer or engineer in training and who works at a federal agency that employs at least 50 engineers worldwide. There are nearly 800 engineers who work for the NRCS. The annual competition honors federal engineers for their professionalism, engineering accomplishments, and civic and humanitarian activities.

"Norm's ability to break down complex issues into bite-size, easy-to-understand pieces has been crucial to the successful training of nearly 650 AutoCAD users within NRCS," said Christian Osborn, NRCS State Conservation Engineer in Iowa. "He has advanced AutoCAD and Global Positioning Systems technologies throughout the agency, helping increase the efficiency of NRCS engineers and conservation planners—and ultimately improving the customer service we provide farmers and landowners across the country."

During his 34-year NRCS career, he has led the state's efforts to incorporate Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data into NRCS engineering design programs, developed nine engineering design



NRCS Civil Engineer (holding plaque) was one of 32 finalists for top Federal engineer. On Feb. 22, he attended the awards ceremony at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. Pictured (Left to Right): Steve Durgin, National Design Engineer, Norman and his wife Susan, Claudia Hoeft, National Hydraulic Engineer, and Iowa NRCS State Engineer Christian Osborn.

spreadsheets and provided leadership with the agency's adoption of time-saving technologies like pipe camera inspection systems and bathymetric survey equipment.

Friedrich graduated with distinction from Iowa State University and is a licensed Professional Engineer in Iowa. He recently concluded serving a 120-day detail as the NRCS national Engineering Software Coordinator.

Along with decades of service to NRCS, Friedrich volunteers locally and globally in supporting several issues including world hunger reduction and mental health. He is a founding member of his local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and serves as board vice-president.

This is the second time an Iowa NRCS engineer received this recognition. Retired State Conservation Engineer Mark Jensen was the National NRCS Federal Engineer of the Year in 2006.

Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Zapata, Rachel	Program Assistant	Career Cond Appt.	1/20/19	Area 5 Programs
Foubert, Matthew	Program Assistant	Retirement	1/31/19	Area 3 Programs
Hill, Stephanie	Soil Conservationist	Retirement	1/31/19	Fort Dodge
Johnson, James	Drill Rig Operator	Retirement	1/31/19	
Barkley, Kevin	Civil Engineering Tech	Promotion	2/3/19	Area 2 Engineering
Gilles, Chad	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	2/3/19	West Union Area 3
Ham, Sarah	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	2/3/19	Area 5 Agronomic
Henderson, Michael	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	2/3/19	State Office - DSM
Shaw, Chandra	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	2/3/19	West Union Area 3
Yule, Katie	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	2/3/19	West Union Area 3
Eggert, Aaron	Soil Conservationist	Reassignment	2/3/19	Ankeny
Mier, Roberto	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	2/3/19	State Office - DSM
Neely, Rubyana	Soil Conservationist	Reassignment	2/3/19	Indianola
Adam, Eric	Soil Conservationist	Conv to Career Appt	2/17/19	Wapello
Gubbels, Julia	Soil Conservationist	Conv to Career Appt	2/17/19	Winterset
Meyer, Daniel	Soil Conservationist	Conv to Career Appt	2/17/19	Leon
Sears, Daniel	Soil Conservationist	Conv to Career Cond Appt	2/17/19	Toledo
Frederiksen, Ross	Civil Engineering Tech	Promotion	2/17/19	Area 1 Engineering
Prassas, Anastasia	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	2/17/19	Fairfield Area 5
Trout, Justin	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	2/17/19	Area 1 Agronomic
Sporrer, Jeffrey	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	2/17/19	Area 1 Agronomic
Thompson, Jacob	Civil Engineering Tech	Reassignment	2/17/19	Newton
Strasko, Suzanna	Soil Conservationist	Career Cond Appt	3/3/19	Centerville
Winters, Leann	Soil Conservationist	Conv to Career Appt	3/3/19	Donnellson
Monroe, Bailey	Civil Engineer	Conv to Career Cond Appt	3/3/19	Area 1 Engineering
Richardson, Bradley	Soil Conservationist	Conv to Career Cond Appt	3/3/19	Logan
Schwartz, Carolyn	Civil Engineering Tech	Promotion	3/3/19	Guthrie Center
Zimmerman, Joseph	Civil Engineer	Reassignment	3/3/19	State Office - DSM
Scharnhorst, Adam	Soil Conservation Tech	Conv to Career Cond Appt	3/17/19	Oskaloosa

Changes In IDALS-DSCWQ PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Rank, Jennifer	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	1/29/19	Hamilton SWCD
Quint, Greg	Field Auditor	Resigned	2/15/19	Accounting Bureau
Garvey, Ann	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	2/26/19	Webster SWCD
Lowry, Jeanine	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	2/26/19	Calhoun SWCD
Reed, Austin	Soil Conservation Tech	New Hire	3/1/19	Madison/Warren SWCD
Burke, Megan	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	3/15/19	Clinton SWCD
Curran, Jeanna	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	3/22/19	Black Hawk SWCD
Wearmouth, Debbra	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	4/5/19	Jasper SWCD
Osborn, Ann	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	4/9/19	Emmet SWCD

Upcoming Events

