

Iowa Chapter Newsletter

Soil & Water Conservation Society
February 2025



SOIL
AND WATER
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY

Miranda Haes President's Report



*Miranda Haes,
Iowa SWCS Chapter
President*

Hello Iowa Chapter SWCS members! Welcome to February! We have now crossed over to gradually longer days, providing us more daylight. Our weather pattern is anywhere from frigid

to fairly comfortable temperatures, giving us a sneak peak into the spring that is just around the corner.

I wanted to extend a deep and sincere THANK YOU to all of you for your work and/or involvement with soil and water conservation efforts across the state! Without the hard work of members like each and every one of you, I do believe we'd be in a very different place than we are today.

We recently held the Executive Committee meeting at HQ earlier in January. It is at this time that we began planning for the upcoming year.

Let me tell you, we have MANY big ideas. While we may not get to all of

them, know that we are working hard to make sure you get the most out of your membership with the Iowa Chapter! I'm looking forward during these next few months as the President of the Iowa Chapter to working with our Executive Committee, bringing you exciting and educational opportunities all around the state. Be on the lookout for our upcoming Summer Meeting come June along with regional events specific to your areas.

In this issue we will be welcoming President Elect, Alycia Willenbring, as well as new members in our state, recap of our annual meeting, scholarship awardees, and so much more!

I am thrilled to be your President and look forward to working with all of you!

Stay connected to SWCS! Check your contact information in the [SWCS membership database](#) to continue receiving conservation updates and networking opportunities.

Sincerely, Miranda Haes

Iowa SWCS Board Members

PRESIDENT

Miranda Haes
Miranda.Haes@dnr.iowa.gov

PRESIDENT ELECT

Alycia Willenbring
alyciarecker@gmail.com

PAST PRESIDENT

Jerry Neppel
Jerry.Neppel@iowaagriculture.gov

SECRETARY

Ann Wolf
awolf@midwesthealthyag.org

TREASURER

Anna Golightly
annalynmac@gmail.com

MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

Caleb Rasmussen
caleb.rasmussen@isginc.com

SOCIAL MEDIA CHAIR

Samantha Gorbet
samantha.gorbet@usda.gov

CENTRAL AREA CHAIR

Heidi Ackerman
heidimdittmer@gmail.com

SOUTHWEST AREA CHAIR

Jon Tesdell
jonathan.tesdell@usda.gov

NORTHEAST AREA CHAIR

Helen Leavenworth
helen.leavenworth@usda.gov

NORTHWEST AREA CHAIR

Kelsi Sieren
sierenkelsi@gmail.com

SOUTHEAST AREA CHAIR

Anshu Singh
a-singh2@wiu.edu

President-Elect Introduction

by *Alycia Willenbring*



Alycia Willenbring, Iowa SWCS, President-Elect

I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside other conservation enthusiasts on the Iowa Chapter SWCS Board – to help share about the importance of soil health and water quality in the State. I have worked professionally in the conservation fields for over 8 years and have a deep passion for outreach and education.

I come from a long line of farmers who immigrated here from Germany, in hopes to plant the fertile soils of a once prosperous prairie-land in Iowa; to build a better future for their children and families. Wanting a better future for the next generation is something anyone can understand. Since a young child, running my fingers through the silt fields on my grandparent's farms, I have always been smitten with soil and eager to learn all I can about the fascinating substrate it is. This has led to a career rooted in soil and soil health, working with farmers to conserve natural resources in Iowa.

In my personal life, I have two rambunctious toddlers and a wonderful husband. He and I have spent the last several years restoring a beautiful Victorian home for which our children can grow up in. I enjoy volunteering for community and charity events, and commission art projects when life allows. I have moved 31 times throughout the years and have found my way back home, where both my husband's and my family once settled many years ago.

Annual Meeting Recap

by *Anna Golightly*



The display room at the Tama County Nature Center.

The Iowa Chapter's Annual Meeting was held on Friday, Nov. 22, 2024, at the Tama County Nature Center at Otter Creek Lake and Park near Toledo.

Clare Lindahl, CEO of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, gave a presentation on "The Value of Building Community in Conservation."

She shared how SWCS is building community through chap-



2025 Iowa Chapter Annual Meeting attendees.

was ranked as the most effective method of implementing conservation practices.

(Note: The Conservation Practitioner Polls from 2021 and 2024 can be found with other Reports on the SWCS website: <https://www.swcs.org/resources/publications/reports>)

Curtis Behrens, the Tama County Conservation Board Director, shared a video and presentation about the restoration work that has been done at Otter Creek Lake, an overview of the park and the County Conservation Board, and gave a tour of the nature center's display room which features a diorama of a riparian ecosystem with native flora and fauna.

(You can watch a video about the lake restoration project: <https://youtu.be/5WKAES7ysYI?si=p8-KO8iu9wRqGYYW> and learn more about Otter Creek Lake and Park: https://tamacounty.iowa.gov/conservation/parks_wildlife_areas/otter_creek_lake_and_park/)

After lunch, we traveled to the Meskwaki Settlement for a tour of the gardens led by Avis Bear-Bass and Luke Kapayou with the Meskwaki Food Sovereignty Initiative staff. Attendees learned about the seed saving program, the Three Sisters (corn, beans,

and squash) and how food from the gardens is distributed among members of the settlement.



Touring Meskwaki Settlement gardens.

ters and the Emerging Leaders Program, discussed the value of social capital, and highlighted some key findings from the Conservation Practitioner Poll in 2021, such as that, "building long-term relationships with farmers/landowners through multiple interactions over time,"

2024 Presidential Citation Recipients

by **Jerry Neppel**

Citation award winners:

Barb Stewart for assisting with the Iowa Women in Agriculture Conference SWCS Chapter booth and Alan Lauver for his continued assistance coordinating the 2024 RAGBRAI Conservation Central Tent.



Barb Stewart is given a 2024 Presidential Citation Award from Jerry Neppel.



Alan Lauver is given a 2024 Presidential Citation Award from Jerry Neppel

2024 Scholarship Recipients

The Iowa Chapter congratulates Emma Davis and Anna Hamlett as the recipients of the 2024 memorial scholarships! Each received a scholarship award in the amount of \$1,000.

The scholarships are in memory of David L Schnur, Newman Lyle, Dave Krsnak, Diane Runyan, and Vance Ward.

Emma Davis



Emma Davis

Thank you so much for the wonderful news and for selecting me as a recipient of the Iowa Soil & Water Conservation Society scholarship for 2024. I am truly honored by this recognition and excited about the opportunity to further my education and career in conservation. It is a privilege to be featured among the scholarship recipients.

I am incredibly grateful for being awarded this scholarship and appreciate your generosity. With the recent establishment of the School of Earth, Environment, and Sustainability, I am currently unsure if there will be a

spring banquet or awards ceremony where the certificate could be presented. As the school is still in its early stages, I do not have specific details about upcoming events but I will continue to keep an eye out. Thank you once again for your generous support and dedication to the conservation field. I look forward to remaining connected and contributing to its continued progress.

Anna Hamlett



Anna Hamlett

Receiving this news is such a wonderful way to start the semester! I am deeply honored to be one of the chosen recipients for the 2024 Iowa Soil & Water Conservation Society scholarship. As I approach my final semester and prepare to transition into the workforce, this scholarship will provide invaluable support in helping me complete my college career and pursue my passion for conservation.

Thank you once again for this incredible opportunity. Your support means so much, and I am eager to use this aid to deepen my knowledge of conservation efforts and make a meaningful impact in the field.

Welcome New Members!

The following are new Soil and Water Conservation Society members in Iowa (joined in October-December 2024). Thank you for being a part of SWCS!

Erica Carnes
Riley Christensen
Cassandra Druhl
Allisen Freihage
Rowan Kuechenmeister
Scott Lukan
Brooke Webb
Abbie Williams
Darrell Geib
Ginger Murphy
Kaitie Hartmann
William Kopp
Leo Kruse
Yory Mcgowan

Iowa SWCS Events Calendar

- » **March 22:** World Water Day
- » **April 11:** Clean-up at SWCS Headquarters in Ankeny (tentative)
- » **April 15:** Hugh Hammond Bennett's Birthday in 1881
- » **April 22:** Earth Day
- » **April 27-May 4:** Iowa Soil and Water Conservation Week
- » **April 28:** State Envirothon Contest, Jester Park Nature Center, Polk County.
(Volunteers needed) Contact Dien Judge at Conservation Districts of Iowa at 515-289-8300, or Jerry Neppel, 515-450-2325
- » **June TBD:** Iowa Chapter Summer Meeting in the Central Area
- » **June 23:** Soil Health Day
- » **August 3-6:** 80th SWCS International Annual Conference in Cosa Mesa, California
- » **September 9-10:** Iowa Water Conference at the FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny

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