

2014

Fayette SWCD

120 N. Industrial Parkway #2

West Union, IA 52175-1612

ISSUE #13

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FAYETTE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION ANNUAL REPORT



Together we can make a difference.



Jensen named Conservation Owner/Operator of the Year

Since the early 1980s, Collin Jensen has worked both on his own and collaboratively with local, state, and federal agencies to research and demonstrate no-till-strip-till techniques that help him and others better understand and promote the aforementioned conservation practices.

Over the years, Jensen has also been a large supporter of creating wildlife habitat and advocate for restoring native systems. He has completed Timber Stand Improvement practices in his woodland and while working with state and private foresters he has opened up portions of his timber of native oak regeneration.

For his efforts, Jensen has been awarded the Conservation Owner/Operator of the Year Award.

The rural West Union man's research and education efforts have included trials of innovative practices related to planting, harvesting, trash management, weed management and water infiltration that maximizes no-till-strip-till yields, while minimizing soil and nutrient loss.

As one of Fayette County's early adopters of practicing no-till, Jensen assisted the Fayette and Wineshiek Soil and Water Conservation districts with No-Till Field Days. He has also assisted Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District with early switch

grass trials and served as a commissioner with the organization.

In addition, Jensen continues to assist the Iowa Learning Farm as a workshop speaker and with an ongoing sub-soil project that requires his assistance with research on his farm.

A former Fayette County 4-H leader, Jensen continues to be an avid supporter and member of the local Fayette County Pheasants Forever Chapter.

The majority of Jensen's 2,000-acre farm is in no-till-strip-till systems. These systems are managed using GPS and RTK technology with automatic shut-offs and minimal over-spraying. These systems conserve fuel and energy, minimize chemical applications, and maximize soil, water and air quality.

Additional conservation practices utilized by Jensen include the promotion of waterways and terraces, installation of filter strips along streams and sinkholes, and implementing CRP practices to conserve soil and water quality on his Fayette County Century Farm.

While acknowledging that the use of no-till-strip-till practices may have cut into his production revenue over the first few years, Jensen noted, "I'm willing to take a less yield at the start because I know there will be long-lasting conservation benefits that are



Collin Jensen of rural West Union looks over a portion of his cropland that he practices no-till-strip-till. For this and a wide variety of other conservation practices, Jensen has been awarded the Conservation Owner/Operator of the Year Award.

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"I'm hoping that all of the ground I farm will be in better shape when I'm done (farming) than when I started," he emphasized.

At his own expense, Jensen planted farmstead windbreaks, grass strips, and conifer and native hardwood trees. In addition, he installed a small pond and wood duck boxes. The Fayette County SWCD Commission

also notes that this year's award recipient specifically planted high-bush cranberry and crabapples so that birds and other wildlife would have a winter food source.

Jensen's efforts have also earned him recognition from Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) as a Tier III Conservation Stewardship Program producer.

Identification Statement

The Fayette County Soil & Water Conservation District's Annual Report

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Outdoor Education is Fun!

By Tamara Buitenwerf,
Soil Conservationist

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A little further down the timber trail, children jump, squeal and point out the barn owl roosted on a tree while trying to guess what type of owl it is.

Back out onto the grass field border where the sun is kissing the

cheeks of precious 3rd graders, they check out the contents of a bee-free hive and try on the beekeeper hat and veil.

Winding around the hill on a contour buffer strip, I find students rubbing cool, moist soil through their fingers comparing the size of the individual soil particles. When they're done looking at a dug out soil pit, they wander through a mini corn maize to another station where they giggle and squeal as they erode down the hill like a soil particle.

Surely you've guessed by now

that this was an outdoor adventure, not a story in a text book.

That's the purpose of the Fayette Soil and Water Conservation District's (SWCD) Third Grade Field Day, an annual event that has occurred each of the last 18 years on Dick and Dorothy Jensen's farm, located just a few miles east of West Union.

While a new group of students began gathering around Mr. Jensen, I asked him why they do this field day year after year. His response, although interrupted by inviting kids to gather closer, hit the nail on the head when he said "[we're providing the students] with a joyful experience that has long term educational benefits."

Children these days are much like us parents, they're so plugged into electronics. Anything we can do to bring the child back to the land, to give them an understanding of where their food comes from, and to help them understand the value of the land we've inherited is going to benefit all of us down the road.

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Oelwein students try on the beekeeping gear at this past year's Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District Third Grade Field Day at the Richard Jensen Farm.

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION —
Continued on page 4



Oelwein students were learning about soil when this photo was taken during the 2011 Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District Third Grade Field Day.

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION —
Continued on page 4



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FINANCIAL REPORT OF STATE FUNDS July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011

IM Budget Allocation	\$ 2,060.00
Supplemental Allocation	\$ 1,000.00
Commissioner Expenses	\$ 1,791.69
Office Expenses	\$ 1,268.31

FY 2011	
Bonding 2 State Cost-Share Funds Allocation	\$ 45,281.34
Obligated	\$ 26,886.58
Spent	\$ 14,404.51
Balance	\$ 3,990.25

State Cost-Share Allocation	\$ 47,059.45
Obligated	\$ 21,847.51
Spent	\$ 22,691.51
Balance	\$ 2,520.43

REAP Forestry/Native Grasses Allocation	\$ 28,095.00
Supplemental	\$ 14,894.10
Obligated	\$ 33,530.10
Spent	\$ 8,887.50
Balance	\$ 571.50

REAP Practices Allocation	\$ 19,722.00
Supplemental	\$ 316.38
Obligated	\$ 9,690.00
Spent	\$ 9,501.00
Balance	\$ 215.52

Nutting Creek 319 Funds Allocation	\$ 87,363.00
Obligated	\$ 0.00
Spent	\$ 42,994.69
Balance	\$ 34,368.31

Nutting Creek WSPF Funds Allocation	\$ 47,351.25
Obligated	\$ 3,668.06
Spent	\$ 4,498.91
Balance	\$ 39,184.28

OUTDOOR EDUCATION — Continued from page 3

The Fayette SWCD puts in hours and hours of volunteer time to make this event successful. In a three-day period, this year the district and its volunteers hosted 14 schools which amounts to 451 students with 36 teachers/helpers.

It was a privilege to meander from station to station and not only see the excitement of the students, but also the excitement of the teachers, the parent helpers, and the presenters.

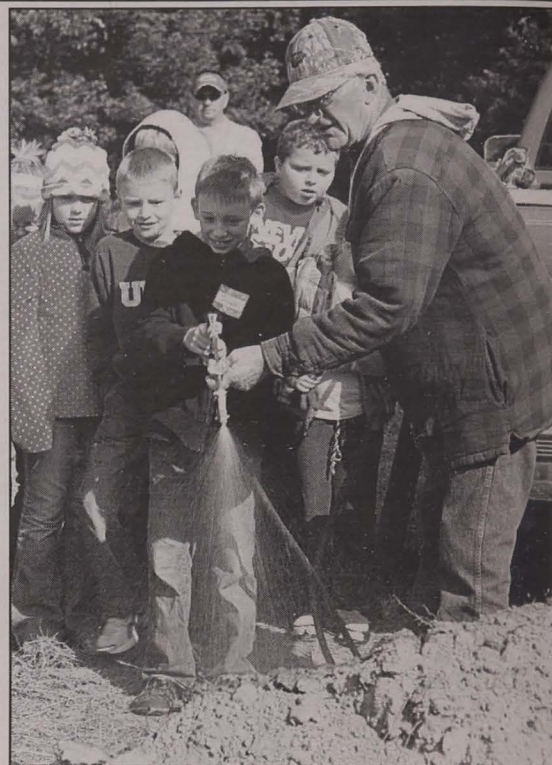
When asked if one had ever been on the Jensen farm before, I heard various replies. One young teacher had indeed been here before – some years ago as a 3rd grader.

Being outdoors on a beautiful late summer day is heaven sent. Learning that fish scales have growth rings similar to trees, that we have three basic soils in Fayette County, that all foods come from the soil (not the store as some students said), that boy bees are lazy, and that it takes 40 years for a tree to mature is definitely educational. Connecting these impressionable minds back to the land is priceless.

When asked "would you come back?" the answer was a resounding "yes!" from the students.

When a 3rd grade student stands before me and tells me that she learned that what we spray can also affect the bees that pollinate the apples she eats, we know they've learned something valuable.

When Maria Medberry can explain to her class that sausage doesn't come from the store, but from ground up meat, we know they get it. And while we watch them load up the hay racks and head back towards the buses, we



Host Richard Jensen educated Valley students on the subject of erosion during the 2011 Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District Third Grade Field Day.

hope they're left with a lasting impression that makes them want to learn more and encourages them to share with others.

This, my friends, is why the

Fayette SWCD continues their educational field day each year. After all, I think everyone would agree that outdoor education is fun!

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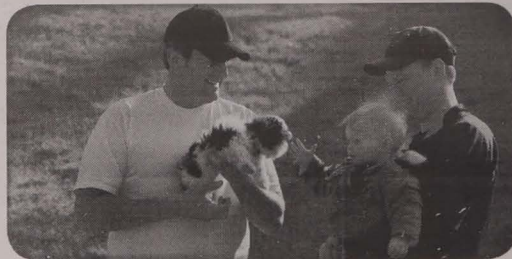


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**FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT
JULY 1, 2010 through JUNE 30, 2011**

District Revolving Fund

Beginning Balance \$ 816.15

Receipts

Money Market Transfers - IM Funds 3,060.00
Money Market Transfers 17,625.85

Total Receipts \$ 20,685.85

TOTAL \$21,502.00

Expenses

Ameri Corp Agreement 750.00
ATV 510.27
Donations 275.00
Education 4,353.41
Houg Property 389.25
IM Commissioner 1,791.69
IM Office 1,268.31
Meeting Expense 895.12
Office Supplies 2,803.91
Otter Creek Expense 132.00
Postage 1,064.49
Sales Tax 84.81
Tree Expense 2,581.16
Water Quality Monitoring 2,500.00

Total Expenses \$ 19,399.42

Ending Balance 6/30/11 \$ 2,102.58

**FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT
JULY 1, 2010 through JUNE 30, 2011**

Money Market Savings

Beginning Balance \$ 56,272.25

Receipts

Agren 1,500.00
CD Interest 696.47
Farm Bill 9 Funds - CDI 3,712.12
Farm Bill 10 Funds - CDI 2,937.60
Farm Bill 10 Funds - IDALS 1,943.55
Farm Bill 11 Funds - IDALS 3,761.10
IM Allocation & Supplemental 3,060.00
Greenhouse Donation 500.00
Nutting Creek Advanced Payments 57,226.00
Nutting Creek Office Reimbursement 132.00
Otter Creek Developmental Grant 500.00
Supporter Club 9,084.52
Transfer from Watershed Account 8,000.00
Tree Sales 6,348.69
Water Quality Monitoring 2,500.00

Total Receipts \$ 101,902.05

TOTAL \$ 158,174.30

Expenses

IM Transfers to Checking 3,060.00
Transfers to Checking 17,625.85
Transfers to Technical Account 17,459.24
Transfers to Watershed Account 65,226.00

Total Expenses \$ 103,371.09

Ending Balance 6/30/11 \$ 54,803.21



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**FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
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Watershed Account

Beginning Balance \$ 3,101.56

Receipts

Money Market Transfers 8,000.00
Nutting Creek Section 319 Funding 57,226.00

Total Receipts \$ 65,226.00

TOTAL \$ 68,327.56

Expenses

Accounting Services 125.00
Federal Taxes 3,545.47
Health 3,846.00
IPERS 2,392.32
Payroll 32,240.00
State Taxes 896.00
State Unemployment 26.47
Transfers to Money Market Saving 8,000.00
Transfer to Payroll Savings (fed taxes) 6,272.74
Transfer to Payroll Savings (IPERS) 2,463.76
Transfer to Payroll Savings (state taxes) 846.00
Travel/Training 464.12
Unused Nutting Creek 2nd Year Funds 2,326.92

Total Expenses \$ 63,444.80

Ending Balance 6/30/10 \$ 4,882.76

**FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
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Payroll Savings Account

Beginning Balance \$ 0.00

Receipts

Transfers from Technical Acct 4,685.66
Transfers from Watershed Acct 9,582.50
Interest 1.51

Total Receipts \$ 14,269.67

TOTAL \$ 14,269.67

Expenses

Federal Taxes 9,489.92
IPERS 1,187.00
State Taxes 3,591.32

Total Expenses \$ 14,268.24

Ending Balance 6/30/11 \$ 1.43



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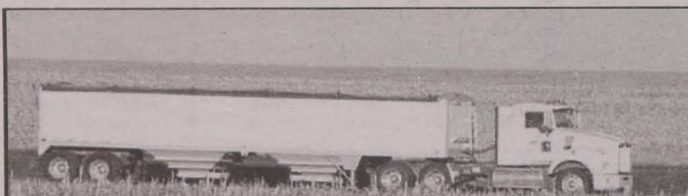
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Judy Ehler, April Hamilton & Charity Kuboushek - Agents



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Meet Adam Rodenberg

My name is Adam Rodenberg and I am a Habitat Specialist for the Iowa DNR/NRCS working with landowners to promote wildlife habitat on their lands. I graduated from the University of Northern Iowa with a bachelor's degree in Ecology and masters degree in Ecosystem Management.

Prior to accepting this position, I worked with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources as a Wildlife Technician in the Northeast Corner of Utah near the Flaming Gorge Reservoir.

When not working, I enjoy hunting, fishing, exercising, playing basketball, and spending time with friends and family.



FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT JULY 1, 2010 through JUNE 30, 2011

Technical Account
Beginning Balance \$ 1,797.80

Receipts
Farm Bill Transfers from Money Market Account 17,459.24
Farm Bill Funds - CDI 1,938.60

Total Receipts \$ 19,397.84

TOTAL \$ 21,195.64

Expenses
Accounting Services 125.00
Federal Taxes 1,202.30
IPERS 1,127.56
Payroll 13,920.00
State Taxes 221.00
State Unemployment 17.58
Transfers to Payroll Savings (federal taxes) 3,217.10
Transfers to Payroll Savings (state taxes) 341.00

Total Expenses \$ 20,171.54
Ending Balance 6/30/11 \$ 1,024.10



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Meet Tamara Buitenwerf

While Tamara's face may be new to the office, she's not new to the area.

After graduating with a BS degree in Agriculture Education and Plant Science in 2002, Tamara began working full time with Natural Resources Conservation Service. After spending nine years serving farmers and landowners in Clayton County, Tamara moved to the West Union office.

Tamara lives in rural Elgin with her husband, Ryan, who's a veterinarian at Valley Veterinary Clinic. They have three children Scott, 6; Bethany, 4; and Judah, 4.

When not at work, Tamara can be found volunteering in her church, her community, or teaching cropping techniques to widows in Southern Ethiopia.

If you're in the office, feel free to ask Tamara about a conservation plan update, grazing, or cost share programs and she'd be happy to assist you.



John Grafenberg steps down from SWCD Board

For eight years John Grafenberg served the Fayette County Soil & Water Conservation District as a commissioner. He and others like him practice what they preach.

Grafenberg has stepped down from his post, saying, "It was an honor to serve the District, but I have always believed change is good."



"We all believe in water and soil conservation, so new ideas along with some new blood is always welcome."

John's grandfather, Max Grafenberg, was 9 years old when he came to America, to Fayette County, from Germany in 1880.

John's father, Ron, was the youngest of six children. Max helped organize Farm Bureau. For 20 years he was the director of the West Union Creamery Association. He helped organize cow testing, and the name Grafenberg became permanently etched in the area dairy industry history books.

Ron would eventually take over the farm, and his Holstein herds earned him Iowa and Fayette County Distinguished Dairyman awards.

It was Ron who quickly put in terraces when he took over the farm north of West Union.

The family legacy was carried on when youngest son John became the third generation of Grafenbergs to operate the farm after his dad retired.

John has since retired from milking cows but will never retire from practicing conservation of earth's two most precious gifts to life — soil and water.

Why Iowa One Call Is Important

By Ray Drewelow

All Iowans, urban or rural, are required by law to notify the Iowa One Call system at least 48 hours prior to engaging in any type of digging or excavating.

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Now it's easier than ever to request underground facility locates, just dial 811. You can also submit a request on line at www.iowaonecall.com. Iowa One Call representatives handle more than 400,000 calls and coordinate more than two million locate requests per year in communities throughout Iowa. Their peak periods are during spring and fall, when customer service representatives handle up to 50,000 calls per month.

FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT JULY 1, 2010 through JUNE 30, 2011

<u>CD 1</u>		
Beginning Balance		\$ 23,602.45
Receipts		
Interest	427.71	
Transfer from CD 3	969.84	
Total Receipts		\$ 1,397.55
TOTAL		\$ 25,000.00
Expenses		
Transfer to CD 4	25,000.00	
Total Expenses		\$ 25,000.00
Ending Balance 6/30/11		\$ 0.00

<u>CD 2</u>		
Beginning Balance		\$ 19,000.00
Receipts		
Interest	344.31	
Transfer from CD 3	5,655.69	
Total Receipts		\$ 6,000.00
TOTAL		\$ 25,000.00
Expenses		
Transfer to CD 5	25,000.00	
Total Expenses		\$ 25,000.00
Ending Balance 6/30/11		\$ 0.00

<u>CD 3</u>		
Beginning Balance		\$ 10,721.71
Receipts		
Interest	88.40	
Total Receipts		\$ 88.40
TOTAL		\$ 10,810.11
Expenses		
Transfer to CD 1	969.84	
Transfer to CD 2	5,655.69	
Total Expenses		\$ 6,625.53
TOTAL		\$ 4,184.58
Transfer to CD 6	4,184.58	
Ending Balance 6/30/11		\$ 0.00

<u>CD 4</u>		
Beginning Balance		\$ 25,000.00
Ending Balance 6/30/11		\$ 25,000.00

<u>CD 5</u>		
Beginning Balance		\$ 25,000.00
Ending Balance 6/30/11		\$ 25,000.00

<u>CD 6</u>		
Beginning Balance		\$ 4,184.58
Ending Balance 6/30/11		\$ 4,184.58

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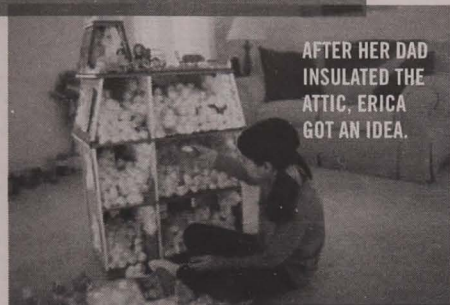
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Summary Conservation Practices

	Applied
Brush Management (314) (ac)	92
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan - Applied (103) (no)	3
Contour Buffer Strips (332) (ac)	6
Cover Crop (340) (ac)	113
Fence (382) (ft)	4,756
Filter Strip (393) (ac)	90
Forest Stand Improvement (666) (ac)	37
Grassed Waterway (412) (ac)	61
Nutrient Management (590) (ac)	413
Prescribed Grazing (528) (ac)	60
Residue and Tillage Management, Mulch Till (345) (ac)	4,628
Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till/Strip Till (329) (ac)	815
Riparian Forest Buffer (391) (ac)	5
Stripcropping (585) (ac)	325
Subsurface Drain (606) (ft)	11,200
Terrace (600) (ft)	10,235
Tree/Shrub Establishment (612) (ac)	91
Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (490) (ac)	33
Underground Outlet (620) (ft)	9,309
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) (ac)	466
Waste Storage Facility (313) (no)	2
Water and Sediment Control Basin (638) (no)	8
Wetland Restoration (657) (ac)	57

New Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contracts	8
New Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts	13
New Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) contracts	6
Payments on 92 Existing CSP contracts	\$925,639.00
Payments on 31 Existing EQIP contracts	\$188,715.00
Payments on 14 Existing WHIP contracts	\$14,692.00
New General Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres	240.4
New Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres	1026.4

Meet Chris Kroemer

Hi, my name is Chris Kroemer. I work in the Fayette County NRCS field office, as an Earth team volunteer. I grew up outside the small town of Lowden, IA, on a family farm. I graduated from Upper Iowa University.

When I'm not working, I enjoy hunting deer and attending stock car races. I look forward to meeting and working with new people in this field.



Dave Drilling

I was born and raised on a farm in Fayette County. My wife, Rhonda, was raised on a farm in Chickasaw County. We both graduated from Turkey Valley High School. Our 12-year-old son, Isaiah, and 8-year-old daughter, Olivia, also attend Turkey Valley. My wife and I both graduated from ISU.

I worked off the farm for 18 years in engineering and management, while continuing to participate in farming with my parents.

In 2006, my wife and I started to rent land from my parents, which included their parents' farms.

Like my parents and grandparents, my wife and I know we must preserve the land for our children. We have integrated our farming operation with the CRP and CSP. Some of our conservation practices include no-till, strip-till, contours, waterways, buffer strips, and terraces. We also do some custom work for other conservation-minded farmers.

Joining the SWCD committee has been an eye-opening experience. I had no idea of all the behind-the-scenes work that the NRCS staff and commissioners do to make conservation happen. I am pleased to join such a knowledgeable group.

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Where have all the pheasants gone?

Pheasants, or the lack thereof, are a hot topic among many people these days, hunters, farmers, and legislators included.

Everyone is looking for that one thing that is causing the demise of this once abundant game bird. Predators, weather, lack of habitat, and even the abundance of wild turkeys are some of the culprits I hear people say.

The other, and probably bigger, question is what can we do to help bring back this important bird back to prominence?

Looking more deeply into the question of what happened, we find that it's not just one thing that's brought us to this point. It's actually a perfect storm of circumstances working against Mr. Ringneck.

The weather: People, usually of the more elderly persuasion, sometimes say that bad winters can't be the reason for the population decline because we've had terrible winters with lots of snow and cold before. While that is a true statement, it's also true that we haven't had five winters in a row with above average snowfall in Iowa since we started doing roadside surveys for pheasants in the 1950's. We've had two in a row many times, and three in a row a few times, but never, EVER, five in a row.

Plain and simple, the longer we have snow on the ground, the more hens we lose to predators. When snowfall is above 30 inches for a winter, like we've had for the last five

before this year, roadside surveys for pheasants showed a decline in numbers.

Lots of snow isn't the only weather factor to effect pheasants, however.

Spring rain also has a major affect on a hen pheasant's ability to carry off a successful nest. History of the roadside surveys shows us when rainfall in April and May is 8 inches or more, like four of the last five springs, pheasant counts also decline. Hopefully, Mother Nature continues with a mild winter, with no ice storms and just average rainfall this spring to help those hardy pheasants that remain.

Habitat: It's obvious by looking around a little, that we don't have the amount of tall grass and shrub habitat that pheasants need to survey tough Iowa winters on the landscape like we did 20 years ago. We also don't have as much oat and alfalfa rotation that pheasants prefer for nesting and brood rearing. In general, the quality of grass and woody vegetation we do have on the landscape doesn't equate to more pheasants. We have more tall trees in existing draws and waterways that shade out the grass than we had years ago. Those tall trees also act as a perch for avian predators (more on them in a minute), and escape routes and homes for furry nest predators. A wide grass-edged creek is preferable for pheasants. We also don't have as many evergreen shelterbelts



around farmsteads that pheasants used to take cover from harsh winter storms.

Predators: Plain and simple, hawks are more effective at catching pheasants when those birds are exposed by snowfall and have to travel some distance for food. Also, nest predators, like raccoons, skunks, and opossums, have an easier time finding nests when vegetation is moist. That's where those 8 inches or more of rain in April and May comes in.

Other factors: Theories such as turkeys disturbing pheasant nests, aerial pesticide applications, and roundup-ready crops creating less weedy habitat, are things that are mentioned when people discuss the pheasant's demise. They may (GMO fields and pesticides) or may not (turkeys) be part of the problem, but the two main factors that are proven over and over are habitat and weather.

The bigger question; "What do

we do?" Or more specifically, "What factors can we control?"

Weather: Can't control this one at all. We can control its affect on pheasants somewhat, though. I'll expand on that below.

Predators: We can't start (and won't recommend) shooting hawks. Hawks and other raptors are federally protected and eat A LOT of mice. Biologically, it wouldn't make a lot of difference to the overall population of pheasants. A small impact may be made on nest predators through trapping. A return to 1970's fur prices wouldn't hurt pheasants at all. Remember when raccoons were worth \$30 and fox \$80? The main thing we can do with predators is minimize their effectiveness through habitat manipulation.

Stocking pheasants: Pen-raised birds just simply don't have enough smarts or instinct to reestablish a viable population. Plain and simple, if that worked, we would be doing it. The only way it would have a chance is if wild birds were trapped and transferred to areas with great habitat. Cost would be high, and everybody is pretty much in the same boat as we are with declining pheasants and wouldn't likely give any up.

Habitat: Hey, something we can control! All perennial cover is not created equal. Just because it isn't farmed or paved, doesn't mean it's good pheasant habitat. Let's look at a winter day in the life of a pheasant.

Pheasants prefer to overnight roost in thick, heavy cover that provides thermal protection from the cold nights. That could be dense native grasses or perhaps cattails. In extreme conditions, that may even be under an evergreen tree.

The first thing a pheasant does in the morning is try to fill its crop

with high energy food like corn, soybeans, or sorghum. Preferably, that food is in close proximity to its roosting cover, so it is less exposed to predators. After feeding, the pheasant returns to cover to hide from avian predators and hopefully soak up some sun to maintain energy. Later in the day, the pheasant might feed again if it burns through its morning intake of energy. Then before dark, the pheasant will return to the dense thermal cover.

So, during a cold and snowy winter, a pheasant needs some specific and varying habitat types. Dense thermal cover (Switchgrass), food (corn plot), and loafing cover (plum thicket), in close proximity to each other will carry pheasants through a harsh Iowa winter. Take away any of these, or put them a half mile away from each other, and you'd better have a very mild, snow-free winter to carry pheasants through to spring.

This brings us to nesting and brood-rearing cover, another cover type entirely. Hens prefer to nest in less dense stands of grass, like a native grass and flower mix, so they can see potential predators. They also need those flowers, or other broadleaved plants, for raising their chicks. A diversity of broadleaved plants attracts more insects, which are vital to a pheasant chick's survival in the first three weeks of its life.

In summary, providing all needed cover types on a block of land 40 acres or more will be the only way to bring pheasants back to the landscape on a significant scale.

That is exactly what the Iowa DNR is doing on land it manages for upland wildlife. Unfortunately, that is less than one percent of Iowa.

Landowners that would like to manage for pheasants and other upland wildlife land should contact their local Private Lands staff person for more information and potential cost-share opportunities. <http://www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/LandStewardship/WildlifeLandownerAssistance/FinancialAssistance.aspx>.

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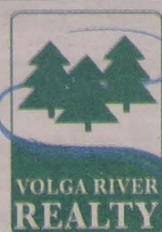
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Improve Wildlife Habitat through Conservation Reserve Program

By Adam Rodenberg

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was first established by the Food Security Act (The Farm Bill) in 1985 to assist eligible landowners, through incentive payments, to retire highly erodible and sensitive lands from crop production for 10-15 years. CRP programs have been proven over the years to improve water quality, reduce soil erosion and sedimentation, sequester carbon dioxide (CO₂), and improve wildlife habitat. The Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) was adopted to the CRP program in the 1990's to allow landowners to sign up small tracts of land for a variety of programs ranging from contour buffer strips to bottomland timber establishment which creates immense environmental benefits.

The CCRP program is a very helpful tool for landowners to not only protect their land from soil erosion, but also to create high quality habitat to attract wildlife to their property. In order to attract and keep wildlife on your property throughout the year, you need a combination of habitats ranging from nesting and brooding to winter cover. The CCRP program has many different programs that will satisfy the needs and requirements for your wildlife objectives as well as provide landowners with an annual payment.

Shelterbelts (CP16A)

Shelterbelts are a practice consisting of 3 to 16 rows of trees and shrubs planted on the north and west sides of rural buildings and feedlots. Shelterbelts provide protection for buildings and animals from drifting snow, harsh winter winds, reduce energy costs, and increase property value. Once established, shelterbelts provide excellent winter cover for a variety of birds and animals including: ring-necked pheasant, deer, turkey, quail, and other wildlife.

Field Windbreaks (CP5A)

Field Windbreaks are a practice consisting of 2 to 10 rows of trees, shrubs, and grasses planted in crop fields to reduce cropland erosion and improve and provide

wildlife habitat. Once established, field windbreaks provide excellent winter cover for pheasants, turkey, deer, as well as provide a corridor for wildlife traveling through your property.

Riparian Buffer (CP22)

A riparian buffer is a practice consisting of planted hardwood trees along a stream channel from 35 to 180 feet wide from the stream bank which reduces runoff, soil erosion, and improves water quality. Riparian buffers also provide numerous wildlife benefits including: nesting habitat, travel corridor, food resource, and winter cover for numerous birds and mammals.

Filter Strips (CP21)

Filter strips are a practice that consists of planting native or non-native grasses and wildflowers along a perennial stream or water source from 20 to 120 feet wide. Filter strips reduce runoff, soil erosion, and improve water quality. Filter strips provide excellent nesting habitat for birds as well as a great food source for pheasant and quail chicks.

Contour Buffer Strips (CP15A)

Contour buffer strips are a practice that consists of planting native or cool season grasses in strips along the contour of a hillside to slow water flow downhill. The buffer strips drastically reduce soil erosion along steep hillsides and improve water quality. Contour buffer strips also provide excellent feeding and nesting areas for deer, turkey, upland birds and other wildlife.

Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds (CP33)

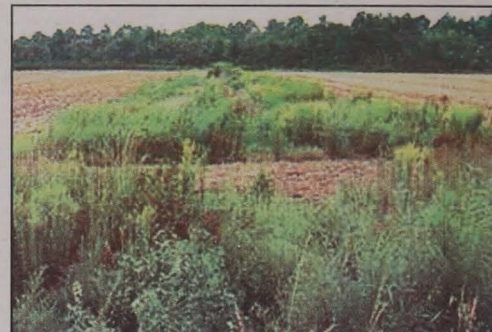
Habitat buffers for upland birds is a practice that consists of planting native grasses and wildflowers along field borders between 30 and 120 feet wide to reduce soil erosion and protect water quality. These buffers also provide excellent nesting and brood rearing habitat for quail, pheasants, and other upland birds. The areas planted in this practice cannot however be used as burn strips or be driven on with machinery.

Wetland Restoration (CP23)

Wetland restoration consists of a practice aimed at restoring

wetland characteristics of the site through planting native wetland plants with an upland buffer surrounding the wetland. Wetlands provide numerous benefits for the environment including acting like a sponge to help filter out sediments and other nutrients found from farm runoff, reduce erosion, and improve water quality. Wetlands provide tremendous benefits for ducks and geese, reptiles and amphibians, and other wildlife as well.

The Continuous Conservation Reserve Program provides numerous environmental benefits such as reducing soil erosion, improving water quality, and increasing habitat for wildlife. The CCRP practices listed above are only a handful of practices landowners can implement on their property to conserve the soil and attract wildlife. Landowners that decide to sign up for practices under the CCRP program will receive annual rental payments for the areas set aside based on current soil rental rates. Each practice under the CCRP will receive from 50% up to 90% cost-share along with \$100/acre sign-up bonus, and some programs offer an additional 20% annual rental rate incentive. Landowners interested in protecting their properties and increasing wildlife on should contact their local NRCS office for further information.

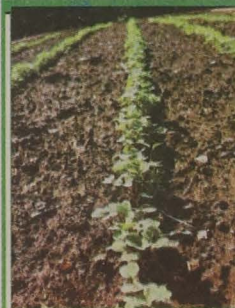


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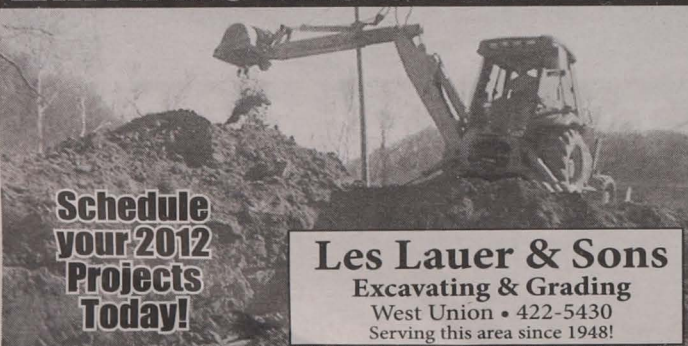
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By Rod Marlatt, Director
Fayette County Conservation Board

The Turkey River as it flows through Fayette and Clayton counties is one of our greatest and most important natural resources. Over the course of the last decade, we have seen the recreational activity on the Turkey explode. As a result, the Fayette and Clayton County Conservation Boards have assisted in the development of several river accesses.

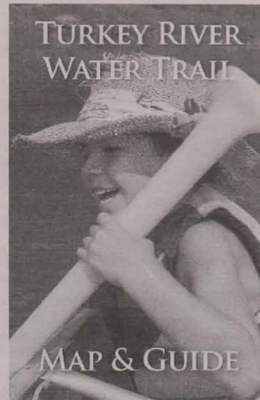
Beginning in 2010 the Fayette and Clayton County Conservation Boards partnered with Northeast Iowa RC&D and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to designate the Turkey River as an official State Water Trail. That designation was awarded. Through the year 2010, and into 2011, accesses signage, highway signage, marketing brochures, and kiosks were developed.

The Water Trail begins on the Little Turkey River at Gouldsburg Park in Fayette County and ends

at the Ferry Landing Canoe Take-out at the mouth of the Mississippi River. The trail is broken up into several segments, allowing users to do certain stretches or plan an overall adventure. The water trail provides 21 access areas, passes through several communities, and is a part of the Turkey River Recreational Corridor.

The trail is over 100 miles in length, making it one of the longest in the state of Iowa. Implementation of the trail was completed in the summer of 2011 and officially opened at a dedication ceremony on July 13, 2011.

In addition to Northeast Iowa RC&D, the Fayette County Conservation Board would like to thank the Fayette County Board of Supervisors, Fayette County Secondary Roads, the communities of Elgin and Clermont, the Turkey River Recreational Corridor, the Iowa Great Places Program, the Iowa Department of Transportation, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. This project



will provide recreational opportunities and help serve as an economic catalyst for northeast Iowa. Yet another example of a collaboration of partnerships creating and accomplishing a common goal.

Conservation Board awarded fish habitat grant

The Fayette County Conservation Board was awarded a Fish Habitat Grant in 2011. Every angler who purchases an Iowa fishing license also pays an additional fish habitat fee. These fees are pooled into a statewide fund. Some of

these funds are then parceled out to the County Conservation Board districts and available on a competitive grant system.

Eligible projects include fish habitat improvement, angler access projects, and land acquisition.

The Fayette County Conservation Board has been very successful in receiving grants for these types of projects. We have done a number of stream bank stabilization and habitat projects in the past. Most of these were on the Little Turkey River at Gouldsburg Park near Hawkeye.

This past year the Conservation Board applied for and received another grant to build two rock-faced fishing jetties on the Gilbertson Lake. The lake is located at the Gilbertson Conservation Education Area near Elgin.

These two jetties not only provide excellent angler access to the water, but also provide diversified habitat and spawning areas for the fish.

The jetties were constructed

in November of 2011 and are ready for the 2012 fishing season. The fish habitat grant program is an excellent example of sportsmen paying a user fee, having that fee provide projects locally, ultimately improving habitat and recreational opportunities for everyone.

Conservation Cover on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

By LaVonne Koch, Soil Conservation Technician

Several important factors in a good conservation cover are: seeding dates, quality of seed, fertilizer requirements, and maintenance.

Establishing a good permanent cover crop and managing the cover crop on all the land needing permanent vegetative cover to last the life of the CRP contract of 10 to 15 years is very important. Conservation cover accomplishes many practices on the land. It reduces soil erosion and sedimentation, improves water quality, improves air quality, improves soil quality, manages plant pests, and enhances wildlife habitat.

Site preparation should be sufficiently adequate to prepare a favorable seed bed and eliminate weed competition to enhance the establishment and growth of selected species.

The quality of the seed shall comply with Iowa Seed and Weed Laws. All seed must be certified or source identified seed. The producers seeding plan developed by NRCS must comply with the laws of approved plant species and seeding rates and select combinations of plant species or cultivars best adapted to site conditions including moisture regime and landscape preference to meet the intended purposes. To assure adequate payment of the seed, the producer must follow the NRCS seeding plan, **not the seeding mix from a local retailer.**

Permanent, perennial vegetative cover will be established during the first recommended seeding or planting period for the selected species or mixtures. Seeding dates of grasses or legumes are spring from March 1 to May 15, late summer from Aug. 1 to Sept. 15, or dormant from Nov. 15 to freeze. Seeding dates of natives species are in spring from April 15 to July 1 or dormant from Nov. 15 to freeze.

Fertilizer and lime requirements for soil fertility and pH level will be amended to satisfy the needs of the specific plant species planned. Recommendations for establishment will be determined by an approved testing laboratory from soil samples collected in the area to be seeded. When soil test results are not available, a general fertilizer and lime recommendation is listed on producers seeding plan.

Weed control during the establishment period is crucial to ensure survival of the permanent seeding. Mowing just above the height of the seeding plants or no closer than eight inches for native species and four inches for introduced species is one alternative to control weeds. Mow early before the weeds have a chance to smother out the seeding, about every two weeks throughout the first growing season.

Chemical control is another source of controlling weeds. Follow the directions of the prescribed chemical to be used.

Burning is also another option, but you will need a burn plan filled out, and it is a required practice on your Mid Contract Management plan.

After the establishment period, spot mowing, burning, or spot herbicide treatment shall be used after the nesting season of May 15 to Aug. 1, but needs approval from the Farm Service Agency (FSA) office.

To assure your cost share of seeding on your CRP acres, make sure you have followed your seeding plan with correct seed amounts, fertilizer applied (commercial or nutrients from livestock), or current soil test, itemized bills of purchases, and hand written bill for seedbed preparation.

With CRP re-enrollments being approved for another ten years, it is very important that the conservation cover crop is still a healthy plant. This may mean that a producer may have to do Mid Contract Management (MCM) the first year of the new contract, or MCM once during the duration of the contract. The purpose of MCM is to manage established plant communities in order to maintain an early successional stage.

The managements will increase plant community species and structural diversity, control woody vegetation, provide wildlife habitat for those species that use early successional stage vegetative habitat, and provide habitat for declining species.

For the re-enrollments, a field visit is completed and woody vegetation is not considered a conservation cover crop unless the contract was designed for tree planting. Therefore, the woody vegetation must be removed and possibly new seeding established if destroyed. Eligible MCM options include: burning, spraying, disking and inter-seeding. The producer's conservation plan will have the options best suited for your establishment.

If you have any further questions, you may contact the Farm Service Agency (FSA) at 563-422-5770 Ext 2 or the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) at 563-422-3868 Ext. 3.



The Fayette County Conservation Board received a grant last year to build two rock-faced fishing jetties at the Gilbertson Conservation Education Area near Elgin.

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Water quality monitoring on Nutting and Otter Creeks

Submitted by Rick Klann
Upper Iowa University

Upper Iowa University has completed three years of water quality monitoring on Nutting Creek as part of a Fayette SWCD project to improve the water quality in the watershed. Monitoring occurred from March through October. Samples were collected every other week from tree sites along the creek.

Each sample was analyzed for the following physical and chemical parameters of water quality: temperature, pH, conductivity, dissolved oxygen and turbidity are measured on site; while samples returned to the lab are analyzed for suspended solids, fecal coliform bacteria, ammonia, total nitrogen and total phosphorus.

Twice a year (May and September), each site was sampled for benthic macroinvertebrates (primarily aquatic insects and other small organisms that live on the bottom). Since different species of benthic macroinvertebrates vary with respect to their ability to tolerate pollution, they can be very useful as indicators of water quality.

The biweekly sampling regime provides a snapshot of the water quality at a single point in time: when the sample is collected. The benthic invertebrates, on the other hand, live in the stream year round and are thus exposed to water quality conditions throughout the entire year. Both approaches can provide valuable insight into the water quality of Nutting Creek.

The three years of monitoring indicate a definite trend of improving water quality. It appears that the efforts of this project to improve land-use practices within the watershed have had a positive effect. For example, low levels of dissolved oxygen can be a limiting factor for many living organisms. By year three of this project, levels of dissolved oxygen were consistently high enough such that this parameter is no longer negatively impacting the organisms occupying Nutting Creek. Typically, high levels of organic pollution (nitrogen and phosphorus) lead to low oxygen levels. Year three saw the lowest levels of phosphorus in Nutting Creek. Nitrogen levels, on the other hand, have yet to display much of a decline.

Another problem facing Nutting Creek is sediment washed into the creek via runoff. Throughout the life of this project, there has been a reduction in both the turbidity of the stream and the amount of suspended solids carried by the stream. These are additional indicators that the land-use projects implemented throughout the watershed are having a positive impact.

As mentioned above, there has not been a significant reduction in the amount of nitrogen entering the stream. Another issue that remains is contamination of the stream with fecal coliform bacteria. Contributors of bacteria to the stream include livestock and septic systems. While there has been a reduction in the amount of bacteria

in Nutting Creek, the numbers are still way too high to allow classification as a stream suitable for recreation involving primary contact with the water.

The benthic invertebrate data also support the contention that the water quality of Nutting Creek is improving. Proportionately speaking, we are seeing more mayflies and caddisflies in our samples (which have a lower tolerance for organic pollution) and fewer midges and blackflies (which have a higher tolerance). However, the overall diversity of benthic invertebrates in Nutting Creek is still fairly low. Hopefully, improved water quality will allow for more species intolerant of pollution to colonize and establish viable populations in the creek, but this takes time.

My lab has also completed three years of monitoring the water quality of Otter Creek. This project was sponsored by Fayette SWCD and the city of West Union. Otter Creek is one of northeast Iowa's trout streams, with trout being stocked at several locations downstream of West Union. The city, with the support of Fayette SWCD, has displayed interest in analyzing the contributions of runoff from the downtown area to Otter Creek.

One aspect of this project compares the water quality of runoff from downtown to the water quality of the stream above and below this input. In order to do so, samples were collected following rain events of at least 0.5 inches.

In general, the runoff from downtown into Otter Creek does not have a huge impact on the water quality of the stream. The runoff is warmer (it picks up heat from concrete and pavement), and high water temperatures are one of the factors presenting the establishment of a reproducible population of trout in Otter Creek.

Typically, the runoff from downtown does not contribute much in the way of suspended solids to Otter Creek, with the exception occurring in 2011 when there was major construction down-

town. The runoff from downtown can contain high levels of chloride, but rarely are these levels high enough to impact the chloride levels in Otter Creek.

Usually, the amount of fecal coliform bacteria in the runoff from downtown is much less than that in Otter Creek. However, in 2011, the runoff carried significantly higher loads of bacteria, probably due to the major construction impacting sewer lines and old septic systems.

A comparison of the benthic invertebrate populations inhabiting the stream above and below the input of the runoff from downtown finds these two sites to be remarkably similar. This provides

further support for the contention that the runoff from downtown West Union does not have a major impact on the water quality of Otter Creek. Not surprising, levels of phosphorus and nitrogen are lower in the runoff, and dissolved oxygen levels of pollution due to phosphorus and nitrogen (and the lower levels of dissolved oxygen that accompany these pollutants). The fact that the benthic invertebrate community is relatively unchanged from upstream of the runoff input to downstream of this point indicates that the runoff from downtown is not negatively impacting this community.

Are you A.W.A.R.E. of this?

During the week of July 9 through July 16, 2011, more than 400 volunteers converged on the Turkey River. This gathering was known as A Watershed Awareness River Expedition. Project AWARE is a weeklong volunteer river cleanup event.

Total strangers, some volunteering individually and others with families, converged on the Turkey River. Together from the seats of their canoes, they embarked on a mission to clean up garbage. This mission brings them together — strangers became friends, friends became family and along the way they learned about watersheds.

It was an awesome event. The cleanup began at Gouldsburg Park in Fayette County and ended a week later at the mouth of the Mississippi at Garber in Clayton County. An astounding feat when you consider this is over 100 miles of river! The project had too many partners to list, but included the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Fayette and Clayton County Conservation Boards, all of the communities along the river, businesses, civic organizations, solid waste haulers, and of course, a multitude of volunteers.

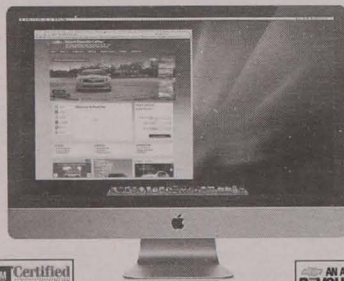
When it was all said and done, volunteers removed over 32 tons of debris including hundreds of old tires and pieces of car bodies. It was incredible to see what some folks could actually load onto a canoe.

We were pleasantly surprised to discover that most of the debris in the river was extremely old. Many of the tires and car body pieces were at least 50 years old. These were probably the result of flooding and were once used for riverbank stabilization. The age of the garbage confirms that society in general is currently littering our waterways less and less and therefore valuing them as critical resources.

The project was extremely successful and was also a project of Outdoor Life's Save-A-Stream Program. The project was the biggest in the nation and was featured in the special winter issue of "Outdoor Life."

Plans for the 2012 project AWARE are currently underway, and the Iowa River will be featured this year. If you would like to volunteer in the future, you can check out the website at www.projectaware.com.

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NE IA RC&D announces new partnership

Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation & Development (NE IA RC&D), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IA DNR), Forestry Bureau, and the United States Forest Service (USFS), have recently partnered together to implement a new initiative to inform woodland owners about the value and benefits of healthy woodlands. Whether you have "just trees" that shelter native plants and animals, a

bit of "woods" behind your house where the kids play and you cut firewood, or a "tree farm" that earns your family income, you have an Iowa woodland. There may be many reasons you own your woodland, including family heritage, privacy, beautiful scenery, wildlife habitat, recreation, investment, or timber production, but no matter why you own it, proper planning and caring for your woodland over time is the best thing you can do to make sure

you, your children and your grandchildren will be able to enjoy your woodlands far into the future.

This project is especially important given the history of northeast Iowa's woodland resource and recent invasions by invasive species (emerald ash borer and European gypsy moth), as healthy woodlands are more resistant to invasive insects, plants and diseases. Healthy woodlands have additional community benefits including reduced erosion

and improved water quality. They also sequester carbon, release oxygen back into the atmosphere and provide habitat for non-game and game wildlife.

If you are a forest landowner with land in the Iowa Forest Reserve, you have already taken one big important step to preserve your woodlands — removed those Forest Reserve acres from damage from livestock grazing. You have the opportunity to further improve your woodland's health.

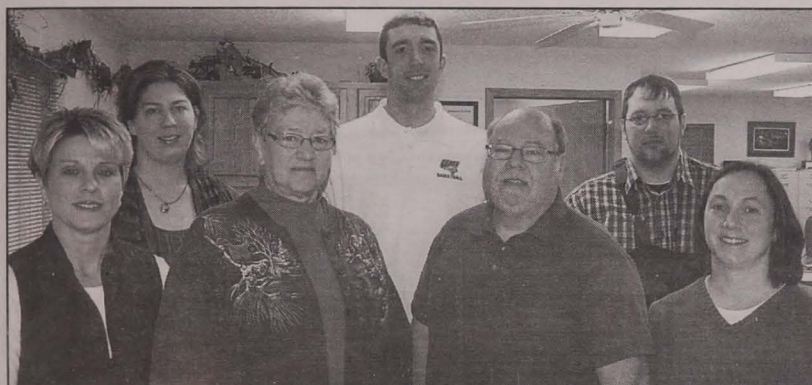
Over the next year, NE IA RC&D Forest Outreach Coordinator Richard Kittelson and Forestry Outreach Technician Jerry Muff will be meeting with Fayette County Forest Reserve woodland owners and encouraging them to utilize a state or private forester for guidance on how to maintain or improve the health of their woodlands.

Public or private, a professional forester's duties include:

- Meeting with family woodland owners;
- Discussing your woodland objectives;
- Preparing a step-by-step plan to meet those objectives.

Richard Kittelson assures landowners, "There is no obligation to implement any suggested practices, but doing so will result in a healthier, more vibrant and valuable forest. Foresters will also guide you to local forest service providers and the best state or federal cost-share funding sources to assist with doing suggested practices. Because of the high value of forests to all of us, there is a considerable amount of funding available to assist family woodland owners."

For further information, discussion or to schedule an appointment, please contact Richard Kittelson or Jerry Muff at NE IA RC&D toll-free at 1-855-568-5688



The 2011 West Union Field Office employees included (front, l-r) Lori Kohlmeier, State secretary; LaVonne Koch, Federal technician; Ray Drewelow, Federal technician; Michelle Schaefer, District Conservationist; (back) Carrie Davis, Watershed Project Coordinator; Adam Rodenberg, DNR Ameri-Corp employee; and Chris Kroemer, volunteer. Absent: Tamara Buitenwerf

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Fayette County Pheasants Forever reaches milestone

The Fayette County Pheasants Forever Chapter is proud to report that it has exceeded \$1,000,000 toward local habitat and conservation projects.

Of the nearly 800 chapters nationwide, less than 5 percent have ever achieved this milestone. Pheasants Forever is unique among conservation organizations. One hundred percent of dollars raised by a chapter stays with that chapter to create habitat, educational programming, and land acquisitions.

Since its inception in 1985, the Fayette County chapter has implemented over 10,000 acres of habitat. These practices include CRP, continuous CRP, shelterbelt plantings, riparian buffers, windbreaks, wetland development, food plots, and public land acquisitions.

These projects could only be made possible by our local partnerships. These coordinated efforts have helped make Fayette County one of the leading counties in Iowa for overall conservation practices. We would like to recognize and thank these partners.

The Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District, FSA, NRCS, The Iowa Department of

Natural Resources, the Iowa Department of Transportation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Fayette County Conservation Board, the Fayette County Board of Supervisors, and of course, our land owner co-operators have all contributed to these accomplishments.

The past few years have been very frustrating in regard to the obvious decline in pheasant populations. Year after year of harsh winters followed by wet springs have been devastating to our local populations. We are determined, however, to continue our efforts to rebuild these populations. Mother Nature has not been kind, a factor beyond our control. What we can control through, is the preservation and creation of habitat.

These efforts will be more difficult in the immediate future, as higher commodity prices always have an impact on our overall landscape. The next farm bill will be critical to the future and it is vital to fight for as much CRP and other programs as possible.

Pheasants Forever raises its funds through an annual banquet. The Fayette County Banquet, its 27th, will be held at Echo Valley Banquet

Hall on Saturday, March 17. Attendees will have a multitude of opportunities to win guns, purchase wildlife

art, raffle prizes, and more. You will also be treated to a prime rib dinner and just an overall good time.

As always, all of the proceeds will be expended right here in Fayette County.

FC Farm Service Agency reminders

• Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) participants are reminded that June 30th is the deadline to certify their acres. CRP certification is an annual requirement. Your annual rental payments for 2012 will not be made in October if this requirement is not met. CRP certifications can be completed at the same time you certify your crops.

• The 2012 DCP (Direct & Countercyclical Program) signup is underway and producers will have through June 1st to complete the neces-

sary paperwork to receive their 2012 payment in October. We encourage farmers to start the signup process now. You can call the Fayette County FSA office and we will save you time by printing off your contracts and preparing additional paperwork before you arrive.

• Report your farm changes to FSA. If you have recently sold, purchased, or are renting a new farm, your FSA farm records need to be updated to reflect these changes. It is very important that your farm records reflect accurate information to retain full eligibility for FSA and NRCS programs.

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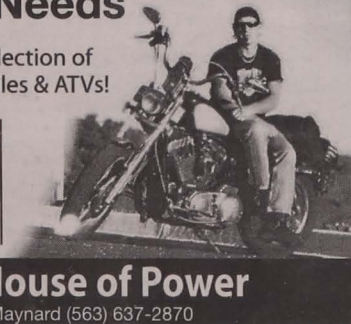
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Without soil, there is no profit

By Mike Wilson

On average, U.S. farmers made more money last year than even before. Crops sales are expected to pass the \$200 billion mark for the first time in U.S. history, while net profits will jump nearly 30%.

Alas, there's a price on everything – even prosperity. Land sales are up to \$20,000 per acre; cash rents are climbing to \$350 or more; and surging input prices will make profits a little trickier this year. Under this economic pressure, what happens to sustainable and conservation farming practices? Will producers who pay high cash rents mine the soil and rip through terraces or waterways to get every dollar back from the land?

No doubt a vast majority of farmers still hold to their convictions that the soil is the root of all profits.

Over the years I have interviewed countless farmers who invested in conservation and believed passionately in no-till or other soil-saving practices. I take comfort in the many times they looked me in the eye and said, "We want to leave this land in better condition for the next generation."

I believe them. But human nature is what it is. The environment we're in right now does not encourage best practices. Pushing for higher yields to pay swelling production costs means you're probably not thinking about lowering your environmental footprint. The soil be-

comes a short-term investment, and that puts your long-term productive capacity at risk. Positioned for profit

U.S. farmers are positioned for long-term profit like no other region in the world. Climate, technology, education, management and infrastructure all work in their favor. They don't have dictators or arcane economic policies to work around. U.S. farmers currently feed 20 percent of the global population on 10 percent of the world's land. They will need to continue to provide a disproportionate amount as global food needs increase.

And you have some of nature's finest resources to work with. But for how long? The United States has lost half of its native soil organic matter, primarily as a result of tillage. That's a precious resource we'll never get back.

Our country's farmland is vibrant compared to other regions of the world, where many soils are withered from overuse, bad management, poverty or poor government policies. Look at the grim results: More than 900 million people around the world are malnourished. About 20,000 die daily from a lack of good nutrition. And all of it is related back to the most basic care and feeding of the world's soils.

Can we save our soils? While no-till and other conservation practices are growing, many of us still farm "the way Dad did." As a result, we lose tons of soil, despite proven

economic and conservation advantages of low-till farming and nutrient management.

Farmers understand how important Mother Nature and biological activity are to their livelihood. From pollinators to beneficial nematodes to green manure crops that add nitrogen and organic matter, we could not be successful without them.

Still, a lot of that talk gets lost in the conservation, especially when you're focusing on day-to-day processes. So instead of innovating, we end up placing enormous faith in our current system.

"If we do not change our thinking, at some point in the future agriculture may become a zero-sum game," says Howard Buffett, an Illinois farmer and philanthropist. "We've seen this already in regions where food security has become a contributing factor in pushing a country over the edge. If people can't eat, they get hungry, and politicians have problems."

We need to take successful steps from both organic and high-yield practices, and merge them together to achieve the best farming systems for the long run. That management-driven system would combine hybrid seed, synthetic fertilizer and biotech, along with cover crops, no-till or strip till, and nutrient management.

It's not that radical. Combining biological techniques with new

or proven practices will provide the most dynamic, successful system that can withstand the pressures of growing global demand and short-term surges in production costs. Every practice described in the paragraph above has been proven profitable by growers all around this country. They simply took the time to educate themselves and put new ideas in place.

We can grow mind-blowing yields and leave a smaller carbon footprint. How? Let's start with

more dialogue about how we farm. That is the great conversation we need to have everywhere, but we're not there yet. Let's talk about what we've learned and where we're going in the long term.

Future prosperity will come, as long as we do not destroy the goose laying all these golden eggs.

This article originally appeared in Farm Futures Magazine, Extra 2012. It is used here by permission. Copyright 2012, Farm Progress Cos.

What's Killing My Pine Trees?

By Jason Walker,
District Forester

On an almost daily basis the phone at the District Foresters office rings and the conversation begins with the question, "What's killing my pine trees?"

The standard forester response is, "Are you sure it's a pine tree, or is it a spruce?"

Iowa's conifer trees in general have many different insects and diseases attacking them, and identifying which bug or fungus they have, starts with identifying exactly which species of tree the caller has. Most tree problems are species specific, meaning a particular insect or disease will only affect a particular species, such as emerald ash borer will only attack ash trees.

If you are having problems with your conifer trees, first identify what

species you have, and you should be able to quickly identify what may be killing your pine trees. Here are a few examples of the most common problems seen in Iowa's conifer trees: Colorado Blue Spruce/Black Hills Spruce

By far the most common sick tree call received at the District Foresters office involves Colorado blue spruce, or Black Hills spruce. An easy way to identify these species is by their short, piny needles. If examined closely, you will find that individual needles grow out of the branch on the spruce trees, whereas bundles of needles grow out of the branch on pine trees. In many cases the blue spruce will have a very distinctive blue tint to the needles, but

PINE TREES —

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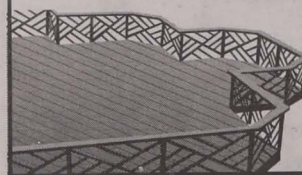
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Scholarship winner realizing her dreams

Cultivating a passion for agriculture

Jessica Duren

For this year's Conservation Scholarship winner, growing up on a family farm has made quite an impact. Over the years, Beth Pleggenkuhle, daughter of Jeffrey and Marie of Waucoma, has learned the importance of outdoor involvement and agriculture.

"It (agriculture) first began to interest me when I joined 4-H and started showing swine in the fifth grade," Beth related. "I love being outdoors and would help my dad work outside any chance that I got."

A 2011 North Fayette graduate, Beth was involved in numerous organizations and clubs throughout her childhood and adolescence.

"When I started high school, I enrolled in FFA and became very active. FFA soon gave me the motivation to give back to agriculture as much as it has given to me," the 19-year-old said.

Once she entered high school, Beth's involvement in local activities, indoors and out, skyrocketed. She was the Student Council president and held numerous FFA offices. A member of the National Honor Society, she was also active in FCCLA, Spanish Club, SIAC, Chorus, Chamber Choir, volleyball and dance. Beth also participated on the Conduct of Meetings and Parliamentary Procedure teams.

Activities outside of school have also kept Beth busy. She has participated in the Alzheimer's Memory Walk, taught Sunday school at her local church, was a member of the Pony Express, attended the Iowa Agriculture Youth Institute, and the Washington Leadership Conference. With a little time left to enjoy hobbies, Beth found herself water skiing and showing pigs.

It has been her involvement



Beth Pleggenkuhle

in FFA, 4-H and the family farm, however, that has helped Beth to realize her dreams.

"Once I became an FFA member my freshman year, I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in the agriculture field. FFA exposed me to the endless opportunities that agriculture possesses," the young woman noted.

After babysitting for a girl who had never lived on a farm, Beth found that educating kids on the importance of agriculture was something for which she had a passion.

"It is a passionate goal for me to work in the agriculture field just as my father has. I am not sure where the industry will take me, but I am ready for the journey," she closed.

Beth currently attends Iowa State University in Ames, where she is pursuing an agriculture business degree.

Greenhouse project

You have likely heard about "The Great Outdoor Education Field Days" for third graders that the Soil and Water Conservation District hosts.

What you may not have heard is that in addition to that education mission, the District has been planting seeds with some like-minded partners to erect a green house next to the elementary building at North Fayette.

This living/growing classroom will enable young folks to have hands-on daily connection with growing living plants. So many different opportunities for students to learn of nature's mysteries can come through planting seeds.

Given these opportunities at an early age, a subtle interest in the natural world could take place that may not have surfaced before. We could use another Norman Borlaug!

We thank all who have donated toward this \$15,000 purchase; however, we are currently suffering a financial support drought. If you have a sprinkle or shower to spare, the

District will store it in our pond called "Green House Fund" until it is full enough to drain.

We all know how beneficial a little rain is at just the right time in growing a great crop. With your help our young students will have

their own living classroom where they can see the fruits of their labor as they get their fingers dirty and learn at the same time.

Thanks again to all those who believe in and support us thru your financial help.



(Bethany Hackmann drawing)

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PINE TREES —

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not always. These have been two very popular trees the last twenty years, especially in wind breaks.

The Problem — The underlying problem with these species is that they are not native to Iowa. These species prefer a much cooler and drier climate. The hot and humid summers found in the Midwest provide a climate in which several tree fungal diseases can thrive. Non-native trees typically have no natural resistance to these diseases because they often don't exist in the trees' native climate.

The most common problem associated with these species of spruce in northeast Iowa is a fungal disease called *Rhizosphaera* needle cast. It typically infects the needles on the lower portions of the tree, causing the tree to shed the needles. Often only the tips of the needles will stay green while the rest of it has turned brown. After repeated infections of the same branch, it is likely the branch will die. Spruce trees that are seen to be dying from the bottom up are likely infected with the needle cast fungus. High moisture levels and poor air circulation favor the spread of the disease. Unfortunately this is the exact effect you desire from a windbreak planting. Having been extremely popular windbreak species for the last 15-20 years, substantial amounts of needle cast are showing up in northeast Iowa.

Treatment requires the use of a preventative fungicide called chlorothalonil. It is sold over the counter under such names as Multipurpose Fungicide, Daconil, Fertilome Fungicide or others. It should be applied when the new needles are half elongated, and two or three times later at

3- to 4-week intervals. It is important to note that if you choose to treat the trees, you can expect to do so for as long as you care to keep the tree alive. It is likely that as soon as you cease treating the trees, they will again become infected. The costs associated with long-term treatments of these trees are often seen as a non-feasible solution for most landowners. Foresters will often highly recommend replacing the trees with a more disease resistant variety, instead of chemical treatment.

Scotch Pine

Another very common dead or dying conifer tree in northeast Iowa is the Scotch pine. Characteristics of a Scotch pine used in identification are the needles and the gold, flaky bark near the top of the tree. If examined closely, the Scotch pine has a bundle of two needles growing out of the branch. The needles are somewhat stiff, and typically 2-3" long. Along with Colorado blue spruce and Black Hills spruce, Scotch pine has been a very popular wind break tree in Iowa.

The problem affecting Scotch pine in northeast Iowa is called pine wilt disease. Pine wilt disease is caused by a group of organisms acting in conjunction with one another - nematodes, sawyer beetles and bark beetles. The nematodes infect the tree and damage its ability to transport water and nutrients. This effectively begins the process of killing the tree, but the nematode is not able to spread to other trees without some assistance. In come the sawyer beetles, who happen to be strong fliers. The sawyer beetle lays its eggs under the bark of dead or dying trees, often ones that are infected by the nematodes. As the sawyer beetles mature, they emerge from the tree and fly away. The nematodes meanwhile

have hitched a ride and are carried to the next tree.

The third villain of this trilogy of destruction is the bark beetle, which is attracted to dying trees. As the bark beetle burrows through the dying bark, its body carries blue-stain fungi along with it. The fungi, which is the staple of a nematode diet, rapidly colonizes the wood of a dying tree.

Unfortunately there is no effective treatment for pine wilt disease. Once a tree is infected and the cycle

has begun, it is too late to save the tree. To slow the spread of the disease it is important to remove and destroy the infected trees.

Approximately 98% of the sick conifer tree calls that come in to the District Forester's office involve the three species discussed in this article. Unfortunately the reality is that there is no easy solution to any of the problems associated with these species. Treatment options have been found to be marginally successful, and in the

long term are not typically feasible.

The standard recommendation forester will give is to replace the dying or diseased trees with a more disease resistant species. For conifers the list is relatively short, but does include Norway spruce, white pine, red pine, red cedar, and arborvitae.

Although the solutions are no what you may have hoped for, hopefully you now have an idea on what killing your pine trees.



The Fayette County SWCD Commissioners recently listened to flooding concerns on the Upper Maquoketa River Watershed with Bonnie and Robert Bassett (top, l-r) of rural Arlington. The 2011 commissioners include (clockwise, from lower left) Paul Hoeger, Rozann Dallenbach, William Bennett, (newly elected) Dave Drilling, and Richard Jensen.

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