

Monroe County SWCD News

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District Commissioners

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Chairman

Donald Niebuhr
Vice Chairman

Robert Scott
Commissioner

Marvin Wirtjes
Commissioner

Joe Pyle
Commissioner

Assistant Commissioners:

Colleen Putnam

Jim Nelson

Stewardship, Sustainability, and Compliance

In our office, we strive to “help people help the land”. In order to do that, we look to the partnerships that we have developed with our producers. Sheet and Rill erosion have been an obstacle for farmers, especially in Southern Iowa, for quite some time. This type of erosion is evident by branching patterns of erosion. This is caused by bare or inadequately protected soil. You can prevent this by introducing no-till, cover crops, and terraces/basins. Iowa NRCS has launched a new campaign called “Fix it, Don’t disc it”. This campaign is focused on educating producers about the requirement to control ephemeral gullies on land determined as Highly Erodible. Typical practices used to control ephemeral gullies include no-till farming, cover crops, grassed waterways, and terraces. As an office, we are available to help farmers identify ephemeral erosion in their fields or where erosion is likely to occur and assist them in applying conservation practices that best fit their farming operations and the requirements of compliance. This step up in conservation will lead to a more sustainable operation in the long-run. If you have a conservation plan that utilizes “no-till”, you already understand that tillage is not an approved method of repairing ephemeral erosion. Soil tillage reduces soil moisture in several ways. The first is reduced water infiltration. Tillage reduces water infiltration by breaking up the large pores in the soil structure, which act as large pipelines for water to soak into the soil profile. Removing residue through tillage operations also leads to more soil erosion. The eroded particles of soil can then clog the smaller pores or pipes, further preventing infiltration and causing more soil runoff. As a main rule of thumb, if you are thinking about implementing any tillage on a HEL field, please come into the office and let us work with you to see if this is an option for the soils in the field.



Farmer's Almanac 2018 Fun Facts

- ♦ The last estimated frost date in the spring is April 25 and the first estimated frost date in the fall is October 6
- ♦ The best days to cut hay: May 11-13, June 8 & 9, July 5&6, August 1-3.
- ♦ The best days to plant beans or corn are: May 20-22&29, June 18,19 & 26-28.
- ♦ The best days to plant cover crops or winter grains are: August 16,17&26, September 13,14,22&23, October 10,20&21.
- ♦ The best days for harvesting are: September 18&19, October 15&16, November 11&12.

This and much more can be found in the *Old Farmer's 2018 Almanac* (226th edition).

Staff Spotlight: The “Well-Seasoned” Technician Edition

Throughout the years, many faces have passed through the office. None of these people, however, are as memorable as Ronald and Michael. When it comes to working with producers to install practices in the field, the partnership that Ronald and Michael have established with farmers and contractors is second to none. The efforts by our technicians to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and increase soil health on farms in Monroe County, with the people in these “partnerships” is tremendous! These guys wear many hats, from Soil Conservation Technicians to farmers, teachers and everything in between. Ronald, the State Soil Conservation Technician, began working in Albia in 1983, and Michael, the Federal Soil Conservation Technician joined soon after in 1987. The experience and dedication of both of these men is second to none, and they are always willing to teach others the “tricks of their trade”. Because of the hard work put in by Michael and Ronald, we were able to help install 45 basins/terraces, 13 ponds, and 1,866.8 acres of cover crops in this county this year alone. These numbers are large, but they also do not factor in all the conservation planning and behind the scenes jobs done by our technicians. Please take a minute to look at some quotes below about Ronald and Michael from some colleagues, because these words say everything about what amazing things have happened in Monroe County because of them. For landowners or producers who have resource concerns such as gully erosion on your farms, we invite you to stop in and visit with our experts, Ronald and Michael, about potential solutions. The SWCD encourages you to take advantage of the 66 years of combined experience Ron and Mike have to offer.

Moving from the flatlands of Northern Iowa to the rolling hills of Southern Iowa, I had a lot to learn about ponds and terraces. Everything I know about ponds and terraces, I learned from Michael and Ronald. I take pride in driving through Monroe County knowing I got to help these two Well-Seasoned Technicians put “Conservation on the Land.”- Stacy Wickman, USDA-NRCS



Michael Gibbs, USDA-NRCS
Soil Conservation Technician



Ron Peterson, IDALS- DSCWQ
Soil Conservation Technician

Ronald and Michael have so much knowledge! The things that they have taught me, both technically and professionally are things that I hope to carry out throughout my career. Thanks, guys! -Brooke Bodkins, Monroe

Iowa law requires everyone to locate underground utilities before digging. First, notify Iowa One Call to begin the process, then wait 48 hours (excluding Saturday, Sunday and legal holidays) BEFORE any digging begins. Call or click before you dig. iowaonecall.com or 1 (800) 292-8989

Financial Report

IA Financial Incentive (IFIP)
Beginning Obligation\$93,698.54
FY16 Allocation.....\$115,637.00
Funds Spent\$124,454.70
Funds Obligated.....\$84,863.43
Recalled.....\$17.41
Practice Installed w/Funds Spent
Grass Stabilization Structures— **5**
Basins — **65**
Summer Incentives — **7.5 acres**

IIIM Budgets FY2017

Reap Practices
Beginning Obligations.....\$8,315.39
FY16 Allocation\$10,061.47
Funds Spent\$15,429.22
Funds Obligated\$0.00
Recalled.....\$2,947.64
Practice Installed w/Funds Spent
Forest Stand Improvement— **0 acres**
Conservation Cover— **0 acres**
Reap Forestry & Native Grass
Beginning Obligation.....\$1,920.00
FY16 Allocation\$3,357.41
Funds Spent\$2,040.00
Funds Obligated\$3,180.00
Recalled\$57.41
Practice Installed w/Funds Spent
Forest Stand Improvement — **23.9 acres**

IM Budgets 2017

Water Quality Initiative
Funds Spent\$28,010.23
Practice Installed w/Funds Spent
Cover Crops— **1,550.99 acres**
No Interest Loans
Beginning Obligation.....\$0.00
Beginning Bal.\$0.00
FY16 Allocation.....\$20,000.00
Funds Spent.....\$20,000.00
Funds Obligated.....\$0.00
Recalled.....\$0
Practice Installed w/Funds Spent
Water & Sediment
Control Basin— **6**

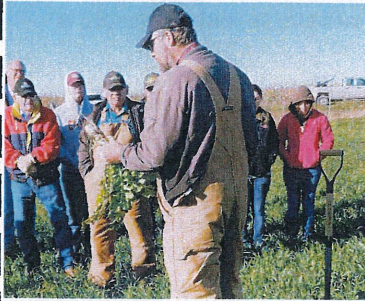
319-Rathbun Lake Special Project
Funds Spent\$0.00

Commissioner/ Office Expense

FY 16 Allocation \$2,000.00
Supplemental..... \$750.00
Mileage..... \$820.56
Supplies..... \$611.94
Conservation Awards.... \$80.00
NACD Dues..... \$387.50
CDI Dues..... \$850.00

Soil Health in Monroe County

On Wednesday, November 15, 2017, Appanoose and Monroe County Soil and Water Conservation Districts hosted a soil health field day. It began with a field visit to a field of cover crops owned by producer, Paul Ammons. Paul discussed his operation and details about his cover crops, oats and radishes. Soil Scientist, Jason Steele discussed the benefits of cover crops and how they impact soil health. Attendees walked through the cover crop field while examining the differences in compaction areas using a penetrometer. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Field Agronomist, Rebecca Vittetoe discussed the different methods of termination for cover crops. Attendees were given a chance to mingle and ask questions for a few minutes before watching soil health demonstrations led by Jason Steele. Soil health demonstrations included a slake test to demonstrate infiltration and soil loss and a Solvita test to show organic matter as it applies to respiration. From the cover crop site, attendees traveled to Honey Creek Resort for



a live panel and a meal. The live panel included: Jason Steele (Soil Scientist), Rebecca Vittetoe (ISU Field Agronomist), Shane Weinberg (Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist), and Brenda Hoffman (TBC Insurance). Attendees were able to use this time to ask questions about soil health and cover crops ranging from how it affects their crop insurance to how cover crops can benefit wildlife.

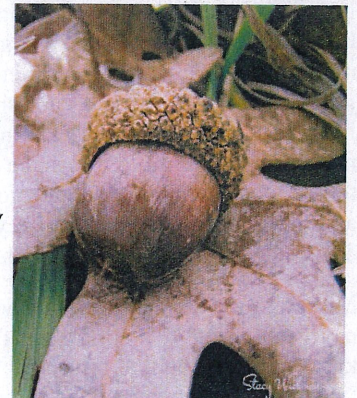


Forest Improvements

Article By: Jeremy Cochran, DNR District Forester

The great misnomer of oak woodlands is to not touch it or leave it “natural”. This is exactly the wrong approach to caring for Iowa’s woodlands. Your woodland is much like a garden such that you do not plant seeds in the spring and ignore it all summer only to return in the fall to reap a bumper harvest. Your woodland is part of the future. What you do now to the land affects trees, birds, animals, plants, and all living things in the woodland for more than a generation. Forest improvement practices affect whoever may own the land in the future, our children, grandchildren, or someone we have never met. What you do in the woodlands also affects our neighbors and the local community. By taking care of the land now, you can ensure healthy woodlands for future generations of all living things. Establishing long-term plans for your woodland property is a positive first step towards good forest stewardship.

For more forest stewardship information, please contact District Forester Jeremy Cochran at 641-774-TREE.



Cedar Creek WMA Update

The South-Central IA Cedar Creek Watershed Management Authority (WMA) continues to work toward their goal of implementing water quality and flood control practices on the Cedar Creek Watershed. We

have just completed a hydrology study and finishing a ground assessment and report for the Bleubaugh sub-watershed. This study and ground assessments will be used as our model on implementing practices and activities throughout the Cedar Creek Watershed. We will be working on creating a Watershed Management Plan in which will direct us to priority areas in the watershed to install suitable practices. Our goal for 2018 is to gain the support from local stakeholders to generate matching funds to apply for a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) federal grant in the fall for 2019 implementation. This grant would be implementation funds for producers in the watershed. Please contact Linda Shumate for further details if you are interested in helping us meet this goal.

Activities to Date:

- WMA established August 13, 2015. Non-profit organization that will collaborate to implement solutions that address concerns such as flooding, erosion & water quality concerns for Cedar Creek.
- 2016 created a brochure promoting the SC IA Cedar Creek WMA and it's efforts toward improving the watershed
- December 2016 Promotion of the project for the 2017 year on wall maps of the watershed
- Received a grant through the Monroe, Lucas and Marion County Farm Bureau's to finance a hydrology study.
- July 2017 Iowa Flood Center installed a stream sensor on a bridge west of Lovilia, in part of the hydrology study
- August 2017 the Iowa Flood Center installed a weather station, rain gauge south of Melrose, IA in part of the hydrology study.
- Completion of ground assessment of Bleubaugh sub-watershed and Hydrology study be used as model for watershed plan



Mania for Milkweeds and Monarchs

Article By: Shane Weinberg, Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist



Who would have guessed that a little orange and black insect would become the poster child of current conservation efforts and an iconic pollinator species practically overnight? Federal habitat programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and others now have practices that provide habitat specifically for monarch butterflies and other native pollinators. The dramatic decline of the monarch has put them in the limelight and reminds us that they cannot survive without milkweed, a plant that many people grew up considering an ag weed. This publicity has drawn awareness to both milkweeds and monarchs and has encouraged the public to look for opportunities to create or improve native habitat. As an example, it is now more common to see milkweed in roadsides where people have intentionally mowed around them. The public has latched on and many people are viewing milkweed as an important native flower instead of as another weed. Even more so, citizen science is now being relied upon for data on monarch movements and migration.

While recently on a site visit for CRP being re-enrolled into Pollinator Habitat, the landowners' deep passion for monarchs and milkweeds quickly became evident to me. The couple has converted parts of their garden and even portions of their yard into plantings of the monarch's host plant. I was surrounded by the deep oranges, purples, and pinks of flowering butterfly, common, and swamp milkweed. I was given the full tour, looking at each clump of milkweed and discussing future expansion projects the landowners have in mind. After seeing their enthusiasm firsthand and hearing about their tagging efforts for citizen science, I offered my help to tag with them this fall. A few weeks later, in late September, I was called up to the big leagues where I was able to tag my first three monarchs, finishing out the last of their 50 tags for the year. Looking at their records, they reared just under 300 monarchs this year; roughly a third compared to last year where they tagged 100 butterflies and reared over 900! This was truly amazing and I now know why their yard is full of milkweed plants. This experience spurred me to dig a little deeper and begin to research this iconic insect in more depth.

Monarchs winter in the trans volcanic mountains of central Mexico on steep southwest facing slopes at about 10,000 feet about sea level. Butterflies east of the Rocky Mountains all overwinter in the same area and the actual population size is recorded by measuring the area of the congregated butterflies each winter. Mid-March marks the start of the migration northward following the growth of new milkweeds each spring. The overwintering monarchs will lay eggs before dying. The new generation will have a lifespan of three to five weeks. In this time, they must continue flying north to lay their eggs before dying as well. At the north most edge of their range, it is the second or third generation of the overwintering monarchs. Once the days become shorter and the temperatures begin to cool this generation will lay eggs for the "super generation" which have much longer lifespans (8-9 months) and must make the longer journey back to central Mexico where their great-great grandparents overwintered the previous winter. The peak migration south for our area is mid-September from about the 8th to 20th.

Monarchs are a remarkable species still full of unknowns. Many organizations are researching the unknowns such as how they navigate during their spring and fall migrations, how the weather influences their migration, and how the great-great grandchildren know exactly where to return for the winter when none of them have ever been there! These organizations rely on public "scientists" to tag butterflies and report when and where they are seeing them. Other opportunities for the public to help monarchs and pollinators are to plant native wildflowers such as milkweed and other fall blooming species. There are numerous cost-share programs and other forms of financial assistance available to landowners to help them design, implement, and manage these native grass and forb plantings. A couple popular federal programs include CRP and EQIP. Contact your local USDA service center to set up an appointment to discuss options available to you.



Butterfly milkweed in full bloom



Butterfly milkweed seed ready to disperse

Client Gateway: Conservation Assistance Is Just A Click Away!

Client Gateway is a public website that allows producers to securely request technical or financial assistance. You can also find your conservation plan, applications and contracts, payments, and much more! More information can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway. If you have questions or want to sign up, please contact the office at 641-932-5144 ext. 3.

Programs Available through NRCS/IDALS/DSCWQ/

<u>Environmental Quality Incentives Programs</u>	<u>Conservation Stewardship Program</u>	<u>Water Quality Initiative Program</u>	<u>Iowa Financial Incentive Program</u>
- Provides financial and technical assistance to landowners to develop and implement conservation practices. A contract plan will help specific natural resource concerns.	- Assists agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities addressing resource concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance the higher the payment	- Provides a per acre incentive for producers to apply cover crops to existing fields. As the Nutrient Management Strategy becomes a larger part of a total planning package, producers can see incorporating this practice will improve their soils health.	- This program allows landowners to implement a practice such as structure, terrace and basins. IFIP will cost share up to 50% of the estimated cost of these practices. Requirements are that a landowner owns minimum of 10 acres contiguously with a minimum of \$2,500 annual agricultural income from the property.

Low Interest Loan Program: This program offers financial assistance when implementing practices such as terraces, basins, grade stabilizations etc. Working with your local lender at a 3% interest rate can make conservation more affordable. These loans can be used in conjunction with State and Federal programs or stand alone.

No Interest Loan Program: The 1983 State Legislature established the conservation practices revolving loan fund to provide loans up to \$20,000 to eligible landowners at no interest for the construction of permanent soil conservation practices. Repayment is made in 10 annual payments equal to 10% of the initial loan amount. In the event of land ownership transfer, payment is due immediately.



Poster Contest Winners with Assistant Commissioner, Colleen Putnam, and teacher Kim George (Above)
And
2016 SWCD Conservation Achievement award presented to Kurimski Brothers by Chairman, Mervin McDanel (Below)



Secretary Northey visiting with producers on a Cover Crop Field (Above)
And
Ronald Peterson, Soil Conservation Technician teaching Brooke Eveland, 2017 Intern to use the Trimble to survey a pond (Below)



Calendar of Events

- ♦ April TBA— Trees for Threes
- ♦ April 29– May 6- “Soil & Water Conservation Week”
- ♦ May 4- Farm Bureau Agricultural Day
- ♦ Aug. 28-30- Farm Progress Show; Boon, IA
- ♦ Commissioner Meetings are tentatively the first Monday of each Month.



Thank you to Cedar Creek Pheasants Forever for providing processing of this year's wildlife corn, and to Albia FFA (Daryl Schofield, Jeff Tratchel, James Wayland, Jer McAninch, Nathan Crall and Kelsey Thomas) for assisting staff with unloading and stacking the corn.

Monroe County USDA Service Center

District Personnel

Commissioners: Mervin McDanel, Donald Niebuhr, Robert Scott, Marvin Wirtjes and Joe Pyle

Asst. Commissioners: Colleen Putnam and Jim Nelson

Linda Shumate— SWCD Watershed Coordinator

Brooke Bodkins— Conservation Technical Assistant

Brooke Eveland—2017 SWCD Intern

IDALS-DSC Personnel

Diana Williams—State Conservation Assistant

Ronald Peterson—State Soil Conservation Technician

USDA-NRCS Staff:

Margaret Cope—District Conservationist

Hannah Grimm—Soil Conservationist

Michael Gibbs—Federal Soil Conservation Technician

Pheasants Forever Staff:

Shane Weinberg—Farm Bill Biologist

A HUGE thank you goes out to our contributors: past, present and future. Without you, our community/educational activities and awards would not be possible.

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Monroe County SWCD

USDA-NRCS

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