



CONSERVATION CATCHALL

In this issue:

No-Till Soybean Fields Give (Even Some Rare) Birds Foothold in Illinois (Continued on Page 6)	1
President's Message	2
Executive Director's Notes	3
Program Coordinator's Page	4
Administrative Assistant's Update	5
Josh Seehorn Update	6
Office Assistant's Information	7
Illinois Chapter IAAP	8
ISWCDEA Corner	8
Focus on SWCDs	9
AISWCD Affiliate Membership	9
Sam's Club Offer	10
Calendar	11

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NO-TILL SOYBEAN FIELDS GIVE (EVEN SOME RARE) BIRDS FOOTHOLD IN ILLINOIS

Researchers report in a new study that several bird species -- some of them relatively rare -- are making extensive use of soybean fields in Illinois. The team found significantly more birds and a greater diversity of bird species nesting, roosting and feeding in no-till soybean fields than in tilled fields.

The team spent about 13 weeks each spring and summer in 2011 and 2012 scouring a total of 24 fields (12 per year) in two counties in Central Illinois. The fields were 18 to 20 hectares (44-49 acres) on average, and the researchers walked roughly 3,200 kilometers (1,988 miles) in the course of the study.

The team found more bird nests and greater species diversity in the no-till fields than in the tilled soybeans. Nest losses were high, however. About 80 percent of nests in the no-till fields and more than 90 percent in tilled fields failed as a result of predation or the onset of farm operations before eggs hatched or young birds were ready to fly.

High mortality is fairly common in bird nests, however, and while the losses in no-till soybean fields were greater than those seen in pristine grasslands, they were not much worse, the researchers said.

A paper describing the research appears in the journal *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment*.

"I was surprised to see all the different birds that are using these agricultural fields -- especially during spring migration," said Kelly VanBeek, a wildlife biologist at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources who conducted the study while a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "I was shocked by the variety of sparrow species that we saw -- white-crowned sparrows and white-throated sparrows, for example."

Some of the birds using no-till fields are grassland species that have been in decline across the Midwest for decades, said Michael Ward, a professor of natural resources and environmental sciences at Illinois and an author of the study. One species found nesting in a no-till soybean field, the upland sandpiper, was an exciting find.

"The upland sandpiper is a state-endangered species. It's doing badly throughout its range," Ward said. "Historically, it probably followed bison herds and liked really short grass, but we



Former U. of I. graduate student Kelly VanBeek discovered that no-till soybean fields are contributing more to bird diversity, survival and nesting success than previously appreciated. (Credit: Photo courtesy



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE - LONNIE WILSON

lonniewilson@gmail.com

I know in about six months someone will remind me that I was complaining about the cold when it is hot and dry, but I'm ready to complain about the heat! How about you! As I prepare to head for the NACD annual meeting, I would like to cover a few of the actions from the North Central Region to carry on into this annual meeting.

I will list the policy and the action that we, Tom Byers, Gerard Fabrizio and myself, after review, felt was best - to either ask for an amendment to address our concerns a vote to forward to the committee assigned for debate on policy at NACD or a vote to send forward with an amendment .

Proposed Policy:

A1: NACD supports changes to Farm Service Agency policy to allow producers to incidentally graze Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) contracted acres adjacent to grazed cover crops with reduced payment or no repayment.

Vote: Yes with amendment

A2: NACD, in cooperation with NRCS, USDA and the Risk Management Agency, support extension of the deadline for haying, grazing and harvesting cover crops when warranted due to adverse crop conditions (soil moisture, temperature, etc.) in order to provide needed flexibility under highly variable weather conditions while maintaining the many benefits of cover crops.

Vote: Yes with amendment

A3: NACD supports changes to current USDA Risk Management Agency policy to require Cover Crops be planted following NRCS Field Office Technical Guide on all Prevented Planting acres whenever it is physically possible to provide multiple conservation and soil health benefits. **Vote: Yes with amendment**

A4: NACD supports changes to USDA rules that prohibit mowing of CRP grassed waterways during certain times of the year to reflect a timely maintenance of the waterway by allowing mowing as needed to properly maintain the function and longevity of the practice. **Vote: Yes**

A5: NACD recommends the 60-40 national livestock ratio established in the 2008 Farm Bill be abandoned and replaced with language that will allow the NRCS State Conservationist with the advice of the state technical committee to determine the state's priorities for utilizing available EQIP dollars to achieve the most effective and efficient means of protecting the state's natural resources based on the USDA survey required by Federal law. **Vote: Yes (This is the Illinois Resolution)**

A6: NACD supports significantly higher annual Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) rental payment rates to encourage new and continued program enrollment. **Vote: Yes with amendment**

A7: NACD supports an increase of financial assistance by USDA to offset the cost of germination testing when local ecotype seed is used for CRP native grass and flower plantings which enhances the benefits of CRP and protects native prairie remnants. **Vote: Yes with amendment**

A8: NACD supports that revisions to CRP practice standards by USDA be reviewed by local resource professionals before

they are adopted to assure that the practices are feasible and practical for implementation in the landscape for which they are designed. **Vote: Yes with amendment**

A9: NACD supports the following changes to NRCS terrace design and layout: widening of spacing between terraces, greater ridge height, wider end row blocks and/or larger end row blocks on terraces, allowance for increased number of 'in-channel' terrace blocks to continue to allow for parallel terraces when terrace spacing is increased, and allowance for the removal of intakes or more feasible placement of intakes. **Vote: Yes**

A10: NACD supports initiatives to formulate legislative proposals that would provide funding to determine: 1) the distribution; 2) ecological and economic impacts; 3) management and control measures; 4) the ways and means to prevent the spread of both plant and animal terrestrial invasive species; and 5) address negative effects on our economy, environment, or human health.

Vote: Yes with amendment

Other action we moved forward on was approving two regional scholarships in the amount of \$400 for 2014-2015 for a new director to attend a NACD event. This is a big help when sending new folks like we have the past couple of years. We received this scholarship, last year, for Van Bitner and a national scholarship, this year, to send Gerard Fabrizio. This is a great program and I am glad we can continue to provide it at this level.

Locally we are excited about the upcoming Legislative day on the 25th of February which will include a mixer that evening at a local pub for us to have a little more one on one time with the legislators. We will have our Quarterly Board Meetings the following day to help decrease travel to Springfield.

All is pretty quiet so far, legislatively speaking, but we will keep an eye out for anything that might arise where we will need to react to quickly.

One item we need to become more aware of in districts is the nutrient reduction strategy program that is being put together by IEPA and partner groups, including the AISWCD. I am concerned that this may eventually lead to standards that may be difficult for producers to meet while trying to produce food for growing world needs while remaining profitable, good stewards and protecting the rich resources we have in this great state. I fear this may be the first step toward regulations rather than a grass roots, education based approach if we don't step forward now and take action. AISWCD will be doing just that over the next month or so with the help of our partners like IFB, IFCA and others.

As I write this I have been communicating with my contacts this morning in Washington DC and it sounds positive that we might have a Farm Bill on the floor soon. Hopefully they are correct! The next hurdle will be the deficit and borrowing and how that can affect our programs and funding. Well, we will cross that bridge once we get there.

I hope everyone is staying warm and this vortex thing-a-ma whatever goes away soon!



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTES - *RICH NICHOLS*

rich.nichols@aiswcd.org

Finally, it looks like we may get a Farm Bill! After three years of negotiations and several extensions of the old Farm Bill, both the House and Senate are poised to vote the last week of January. I had scanned the Conference Committee report but at 959 pages, it is a bit long to read in its entirety. What I did manage to see was that most of the items we were advocating for have been left intact. Crop insurance will be tied to conservation compliance and there were several other things that I think may prove beneficial for Illinois and for conservation efforts.

Assuming the bill passes, that should ease some of the nervousness on the part of NRCS about their budget and about the programs they will be administering. I'm sure there are many other changes but because of the length of the Farm Bill itself and the time commitment to review the Conference Committee recommendations and how they actually fit in the Farm Bill, I will wait for someone else who understands the process a little better to provide an in-depth review and summary of how the entire bill will affect Illinois' conservation program.

One thing I am reasonably sure of right now, there is no erosion caused by flowing water taking place in any significant amount. With temperatures in the single digits for daily highs and in the negative numbers at night, the ground is frozen enough that it should not be able to move anywhere. Well...unless there are some strong winds. I read in the local paper that blowing dust on January 24th caused two accidents and closed a 10 mile stretch of Illinois 108 near Carlinville. I don't know the field conditions but would suspect there were fields with minimal residue cover in the area.

I do know that traveling to and from northern Illinois over the weekend of January 25th and 26th proved the value of leaving corn stubble in the fall. Where there was corn stubble on the west side of the Interstate there was no snow blowing across the road. Where corn stubble was absent there were numerous cars in the ditch and drifts as deep as six - eight inches in the south bound lanes and in some cases drifts also in the north bound lanes of I-55.

The fact that the stubble held the snow and kept it from blowing is, I'm sure, information that was not wasted on more than a few of the persons who were traveling on the Interstates that day, particularly on Sunday the 26th.

It's just one more case for conservation. We know that conserving the soil makes sense but I wonder how many people, some of whom ended up in the ditch or perhaps even in the hospital, have any idea why the soil and the snow move or don't move and that conservation practiced by conscientious landowners with the assistance of the SWCDs and NRCS can actually make a difference of life or death.

I have no idea if anyone was killed in the dust storm that closed Rt. 108 or if anyone died as a result of an accident caused by the snow blowing on I-55, I-39 and I-57 but I do know that people were injured in both cases.

If we ban cell phones and require seat belts to save lives, how long do you suppose it may be before we require heavy residue or some other cover on farm fields to hold the soil and the snow?

Yes, we do have an erosion and sediment control program, with standards, that can address the issue, but who knows about it and who will file a complaint? Probably no one and certainly no one rushing down a state highway or the Interstate.

My assumption is that we will eventually have standards that will have to be met and they may be enforceable by law. With the onset of the nutrient reduction program within the next two - three years, there will be standards for nitrogen and phosphorus. Nitrogen is not likely to be included in any measurable amount in wind-blown soil but phosphorus may well be.

It is time for everyone involved in agriculture to take these conditions seriously. There are many people who have the attitude that until it is not legal "I will continue to do it". That is a very short sighted attitude and one that most likely will result in stronger and more difficult regulations for everyone.

There will always be cases where there is excessive erosion either from heavier than normal rains or stronger than normal winds but it is much easier to consider those occurrences an "accident" if we practice aggressive conservation voluntarily, on our own or in conjunction with available incentive programs, now instead of being made to do so.

Ask the folks in the Chesapeake Bay states. I'm fairly sure they will tell you to do what you can with the tools you have because a regulatory program is far less desirable.

Rich



PROGRAM COORDINATOR'S PAGE - KELLY THOMPSON

kelly.thompson@aiswcd.org

Greetings!

The IUM Field Manual is complete!!! If your district has not signed-up to receive copies of the Field Manual, please email:
Kelly Thompson – Kelly.Thompson@aiswcd.org or
Megan Andrews – Megan.Andrews@il.nacdnet.net

Requesting IUM Field Manuals:

If your district is participating in the IEPA inspection program request up to 50 copies.

If your district is not participating in that program request up to 10 copies.

The Field Manuals will be distributed by your IDOA Region Reps. at upcoming Land Use Council meetings or if you need the Field Manuals promptly, contact one of the three locations nearest you to arrange for pick-up:

<p><u>Northern IL</u> Kane-DuPage SWCD 2315 Dean Street, Suite 100 St. Charles, IL 60175 P: (630) 584-7961 Ext. 3 E: Candice.Jacobs@il.usda.gov</p>	<p><u>Central IL</u> AISWCD 4285 North Walnut Street Road Springfield, IL 62707 P: (217) 744-3414 E: Kelly.Thompson@aiswcd.org</p>	<p><u>Southern IL</u> Madison SWCD 7205 Marine Road Edwardsville, IL 62025 P: (618) 656-7300 Ext. 3 E: Rick.Macho@il.nacdnet.net</p>
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ILLINOIS URBAN MANU-



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Or Online:
www.aiswcd.org/ium/





Kelly Thompson, Program Coordinator



ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT'S UPDATE - *SHERRY FINN*

sherry.finn@aiswcd.org

Greetings! from Sherry

Listed below is the link to our website for the CREP Program:

<http://www.aiswcd.org/programs/crep/>

There you will see our CREP Resource Specialists, their contact information, and where they are housed. The program is a two year grant agreement with IEPA and IDNR. We have filed for another grant agreement to extend the program for an additional two years. Confirmation on the new grant agreement will not be received until late spring. Any questions or comments on the program or CREP Resource Specialists can be made to the AISWCD office directly to my attention.

Listed below is the Attorney General's link for the FOIA-Freedom of Information Act/OMA-Open Meetings Act:

<http://foia.ilattorneygeneral.net/default.aspx>

The FOIA designee and the OMA designee in your District office needs to complete the training annually, but only new Directors need to complete the OMA certification (within 90 days of their appointment).

2014 Annual Meeting Update:

Date: Monday & Tuesday-July 28 and 29, 2014

Location: Northfield Inn, Suites and Conference Center, Springfield, IL

Theme: Conservation Builders-"Can we do it?; Yes we can!"

Draft Agenda Availability Date: March 3, 2014

Hotel Reservations: April 15, 2014

Registration Dates: Early Bird-April 15 - May 15 - \$40

Registration-May 16 – June 30 - \$45

Late-July 1 – July 8 - \$55

Award Registration dates will be available in the February Conservation Catchall.

Listed below are the links to the NACD website for the Poster and Photo Contests, which are part of the AISWCD Annual Meeting Recognition Luncheon:

Poster Contest Link for 2014:

<http://www.nacdnet.org/education/contests/poster>

(The theme for 2014 is "Dig Deeper: Mysteries in the Soil")

Photo Contest Link:

<http://www.nacdnet.org/education/contests/photo>

(The link is for 2013 info, but 2014 is going to be the same information)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sherry Finn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Continued from Page 1

NO-TILL SOYBEAN FIELDS GIVE (EVEN SOME RARE) BIRDS FOOTHOLD IN ILLINOIS

don't have that anymore. We found that it's going to these no-till fields where the herbaceous cover early in the year is not that thick -- which is what it likes -- and we actually found a nest."

The study adds to the evidence that agricultural practices can have a broad influence on bird abundance and diversity, said natural resources and environmental sciences professor and department head Jeffrey Brawn, a co-author of the study.

"Generally row crops are not good for wildlife," Brawn said. "They're just not. But this paper shows that *in situ* agricultural production -- depending on how you do it -- can have some benefits for wildlife."

The team also found other grassland species that are in decline -- Eastern meadowlarks, ring-necked pheasants and field sparrows -- nesting in no-till fields.

"If you look at birds in general or wildlife in general, the ones that did occupy grassland habitat are the ones whose populations have tanked the most," Brawn said. "But birds are very resilient, they're very resourceful and they're very flexible, and we can take advantage of that."

Of the nests that failed, 65.1 percent were raided by predators and 24.4 percent were lost to farm machinery during crop planting. Continuously recording cameras trained on nests showed that coyotes were the primary predators of the ground-level nests -- another surprise.

"This just shows that we do have predators in these landscapes, which is a good thing," VanBeek said. "Several decades ago, we didn't have coyotes here; we had completely lost those predator species that bring some ecological balance. We may not be in a balanced situation yet, but at least they're present."

The study points to a major opportunity for bird conservation, Ward said. Rather than buying up modest tracts of land for wildlife preservation, an approach that is minimally effective, he said, farmers and conservationists could work together to maximize the ecological role that no-till lands are already playing in the Midwest.

If farmers could be convinced to plant their soybeans a few days later in the spring, for example, it would increase the nesting success of several bird species that are out there now, Ward said. A pilot program in Indiana is testing this approach, compensating farmers for losses that stem from the planting delay, he said.

"There's so much land in agriculture that if only 3 or 4 percent of farmers adopted this approach, it would have a greater effect than all the land that we have in wildlife preserves in Illinois," he said.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 2009 (the most recent year for which data are available) 35.5 percent of U.S. cropland, some 88 million acres, were in no-till production.

"Most people, they drive past corn and soybean fields in Illinois and they say there's no way there's value for wildlife in those," VanBeek said. "But we've proved there is. These agricultural fields are not ecological wastelands. There's some value there."

(Source: *ScienceDaily* "University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2014, January 22). [No-till soybean fields give \(even some rare\) birds foothold in Illinois.](#)")

Josh Seehorn Update

Brrrrr!!!! We thought it was cold driving to work in our cars. Josh Seehorn* is still traveling across the country...outside. From reading his twitter account, he is getting plenty of time inside as well. As of January 22, 2014 he had traveled to Ross County Ohio.

Follow Josh!

Twitter.com/theoutdoorjosh

Outdoorjosh.com

*Josh is traveling across the country on the American Discovery Trail to raise money for Envirothon.





Office Assistant's Information - Gina Bean

gina.bean@aiswcd.org

SWCD Employees and Directors don't forget to register for the 2014 Legislative Day!

**February 25, 2014
Springfield, IL**

- 10:30 am - Meet at the Department of Ag/Discuss plan for day's events
- 11:00 am - Lunch at IDOA (Paid for by the participant)
- 12:30 am - Wrap up lunch and head to Capitol
- 1:00 pm - Meet in parking lot and take group photos
- 1:30 pm to 4:00 pm - Legislative Visits
- 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm - Reception

Why is it important to register for this event?

Registering will allow us to get an accurate count of everyone that will be attending. This will help us have appropriate supplies for the day and allow us to form strong groups to meet with our Legislators.

REGISTRATION/LUNCH ORDER

Legislative Day Online Registration and Lunch Order Form must be completed and sent to AISWCD by **Friday, February 14, 2014.**

Forms can be found on the AISWCD website:

<http://www.aiswcd.org/legislative/legislative-day-2014/>

Registrations must be submitted online. Lunch Order Forms must be emailed or faxed to Gina Bean.

Email: gina.bean@aiswcd.org Fax: 217-744-3420 Phone: 217-744-3414

Gina Bean



ISWCDEA CORNER - STEPHEN MILLER
ISWCDEA REGION FOUR REPRESENTATIVE

website: iswcdea.org

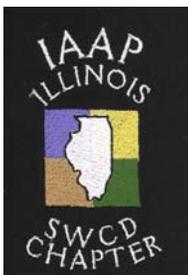
Remember to mark Legislative Day, Tuesday, February 25, on your calendar! Staff and Directors are both strongly encouraged to attend this event at the State Capitol. Legislative Day is far and away one of the best opportunities SWCD's have to express the valuable services we provide and to describe the funding issues we face. By attending, you can ensure your voice is heard by those who need to hear it most, the legislators making decisions about the future of SWCD funding.

Don't forget that you can find many valuable resources online at the ISWCDEA website. You will see links to conference and training reference materials, regional ISWCDEA Reps, tax forms, the Employee Guide, and much more. Visit iswcdea.org for more information.

Your ISWCDEA Reps are here to listen to your concerns! Our first meeting of 2014 is coming up on February 13. If you have any comments or concerns that you would like the ISWCDEA to discuss, please contact one of your Reps and they will make sure your concerns are heard at the meeting.

It's not too late to purchase SWCD license plate frames. These frames are a great way to display your support of SWCD's. In addition to selling them, some districts have offered them as door prizes at annual meetings or given them to PFC program participants. Contact your ISWCDEA Reps for more information.

Stephen



ILLINOIS CHAPTER - IAAP - JANE BRANGENBURG, PRESIDENT

I would like to congratulate Melisa Long of Winnebago County! Melisa has earned her Certified Administrative Professional (CAP) certification through IAAP. This certification is not an easy thing to achieve. Melisa is only the third in our chapter that has obtained this certification.

What is a CAP certification? It is the industry recognized standard of proficiency. If you're looking for ways to help you get ahead in the workplace, stop here. Individuals with the CAP certification also have the option of gaining the Organizational Management (OM) and Technology Applications (TA) specialties. You'll improve your professional qualifications, increase your skills and knowledge and raise your self-esteem by taking and passing the exams. You may also obtain college credit.

We are starting with the planning of Summer Conference. Amy Stolte will be joining us again with training for Advanced Excel. The other session we will be sponsoring is Advanced QuickBooks given by Sally Ferguson. If you have anything in particular you would like to see in either session please e-mail me and I will forward it on to Amy & Sally.

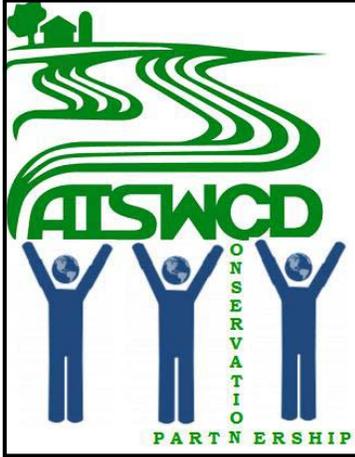
If you are interested in joining the IAAP (International Association of Administrative Professionals) please contact any member of the organization or go to our website <http://iaap-swcd.tripod.com> and view what is happening.

Jane



TODAY!

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www.aiswcd.org/donate-membership/*

Look who has already joined!

District Members:
Warren County SWCD

Corporate Members:
Patten Cat

Affiliate Members:
Marc Anderson
Sheryl and Richard Phillips
Sue Davis
Della Moen

Focus on SWCDs

Farm Family Winners Honored

January 22, 2014 - 2013 Farm Family Winner, Tom and Margaret Hitzhusen, Honored at Henry County SWCD Annual Meeting for their conservation and education efforts on their family



Pictured L-R: Representative Don Moffitt, Senator Darin LaHood, Margaret Hitzhusen, Tom Hitzhusen, & Lonnie Wilson (AISWCD President). Photo Credit: Ryan Arch, Henry County.



Join or renew to receive up to a \$25 gift card*

To take advantage simply bring this offer, along with proof of employment or membership with the Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts, to the Member Services Desk of your local club.

Visit SamsClub.com/clublocator to find a club near you.

* This offer is limited and may be terminated or changed at any time. Join or renew as a Sam's Plus™ Member and receive a \$25 gift card, or join or renew as a Sam's Savings™ or Sam's Business™ Member and receive a \$10 gift card. You must be 18 or older to purchase a membership, and membership is subject to qualifications. Gift card will be provided at the time membership card is issued. This offer may not be combined with any other offer or promotion. Only one gift card per primary member. The gift card with this offer cannot be used toward membership fees and must be claimed within 30 days of membership sign-up or renewal connected with this program. Membership cards are non-transferable and are valid at all Sam's Club locations worldwide. Walmart® and Sam's Club associates are not eligible for this offer. A Sam's Plus Membership and Sam's Savings Membership include one primary card and one spouse (or other household member 18 or older) card. A Sam's Business Membership and Sam's Plus Membership for business include one primary card, one company card and one spouse (or other household member 18 or older) card. Primary memberships are valid for one year from the date of issue. Offers are not valid at SamsClub.com or by mail. Visit SamsClub.com/privacy to view our privacy policy. Offer not valid in Puerto Rico. For a limited time only. One-time use only. Only original offers accepted. Offer valid for employees and members of the Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and is valid through April 30, 2014.

\$25 Gift Card: #970504 \$10 Gift Card: #263396



Time for Your Annual Water Well Checkup

Just as you seasonally check your furnace or smoke detector batteries, the National Ground Water Association recommends an annual water well checkup.

Locally, contact National Ground Water Association member contractor:



National Groundwater Awareness Week
March 9–15, 2014
Find out more at www.WellOwner.org.





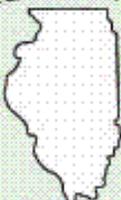
MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

- Lincoln's Birthday - February 12, 2014, Holiday, Office Closed
- President's Day - February 17, 2014, Holiday, Office Closed
- 2014 Legislative Day - February 25, 2014, Springfield, IL

2013—2014 QUARTERLY BOARD MEETING DATES

- March 2014 Quarterly Board Meeting - February 26, 2014, Northfield Inn - Springfield, IL (The March meeting has been moved up to coincide with the 2014 Legislative Day event)
- Executive Committee Meeting - To Be Determined (Board meeting will be combined with a planned Legislative Day)
- June 2014 Quarterly Board Meeting - June 9th & 10th - Northfield Inn - Springfield, IL
- 66th AISWCD Annual Meeting and Conference - July 28 - 29, Northfield Inn - Springfield, IL

CONSERVATION CROPPING

20  **14**

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Mendota, IL Civic Center	Mt. Vernon, IL Holiday Inn Center	Normal, IL Heartland College

Register online at www.ccswcd.com—just click on the Seminar logo! Fee includes lunch. CCA credits applied for—watch the website! Coordinated by local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Illinois Department of Agriculture, USDA NRCS, Illinois Stewardship Alliance, and American Farmland Trust.

AISWCD Mission: *To represent and empower Illinois' SWCDs*

4285 N. Walnut Street Rd.
Springfield, IL 62707



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