

**AGRICULTURE'S
CLEAN WATER ALLIANCE**

NEWSLETTER



What you'll find in this issue

- What's a watershed and a sub-watershed? The answer, plus why it matters for evaluating water quality success
- Meet Gold Eagle Coop's newest conservation agronomist!
- Training opportunities for edge-of-field practices
- The latest on cost share programs, including an expansion of IDALS' Water Quality Initiative



The old saying, “knee high by the fourth of July” is no longer accurate. But what it represents is still true. Summer is a season of milestones.

And just as we look out across our fields to see this season's growth, we can look internally at the milestones we're making toward water quality.

Gold Eagle Coop added another conservation agronomist to their team, a meaningful signal that they are seeing value from conservation advising.

Water monitoring shows us success at sub-watershed levels. Now we need to scale those results in larger areas.

Finally, our board continues transitioning into a CEO-led model designed to sharpen our vision.

Clean water doesn't happen all at once, but in increments. This newsletter is a snapshot of it all. We hope it leaves you as encouraged as we are.

Executive Director, ACWA



Training available for conservation agronomists

ISA hosts upcoming learning opportunity in partnership with ACWA. Don't miss out!

A series of entry level trainings for conservation agronomists will go into the details of engaging farmers, what to look for on the first farm visit, and what to expect as you help farmers get practices on the ground.

The trainings are open to both conservation agronomists and other professionals interested in having a broader knowledge base to be able to help farmer customers.

- July 9, 1-3 PM – Focus on getting on farm and initial scouting goals, desktop to the field, with tips from ISA's conservation agronomists and conservation services managers.
- August 4, 1-3 PM – Facilitating the practice and discuss tricks of the trade, from planning through maintenance. Improve understanding of the process, how to engage, and who partners are to streamline the process.

Bring questions about potential sites with for discussion on the fly (please have site coordinates in decimal degrees. For example, the front doors of the Iowa Soybean Association office are located at: 41.710754, -93.615622).

Stay for a sandwich and network with conservation agronomists and conservation professionals or grab a sandwich for the road.

The training is hosted by ISA in collaboration with ACWA. Trainings will be held at the Iowa Soybean Association, Pioneer Room (1255 SW Prairie Trail Parkway, Ankeny, Iowa 50023) in Ankeny, Iowa.

Funding for this training is from the Walton Family Foundation and Greater Outdoors Foundation.



Please RSVP to Rob Davis at rdavis@iasoybeans.com, who can also help with travel assistance if needed.



conservation agronomy



Five things to check now for a successful harvest



**By Matt Swanson,
Gold Eagle Coop**

1. Scout for Late-Season Diseases and Stalk Quality

Tar spot, sudden death syndrome, and other late-season diseases can impact yield and standability. Pay close attention to fields with high disease pressure and evaluate stalk quality to prioritize harvest order.

2. Check Nitrogen Performance

Look for areas of yellowing or nitrogen deficiency and note where nitrogen management worked well—or didn't. These observations can help fine-tune nitrogen rates, timing, and application methods for next year.

3. Evaluate Soil Erosion and Water Movement

After heavy rains, identify areas with rills, gullies, ponding, or sediment loss. These locations may be good candidates for cover crops, reduced tillage, grassed waterways, or edge-of-field practices.

4. Plan Cover Crop Acres Before Harvest Starts

Fields intended for cover crops should be identified now. Consider seeding method, species selection, and available cost-share opportunities. Early planning often leads to better establishment and less harvest-season stress.

5. Flag Fields for Future Conservation Opportunities

Take note of fields with recurring wet spots, tile outlets, or nutrient loss concerns. These areas may be suitable for practices such as saturated buffers, bioreactors, no-till, strip-till, or cover crops that can improve both productivity and water quality.

conservation agronomy

Meet Gold Eagle Coop's newest conservation agronomist

My name is Allison Paterson, and I am joining Matt Swanson as a Conservation Agronomist. I just finished up schooling at Iowa State University with a degree in Agronomy, a certificate in soil science with a minor in horticulture.

I am excited to join the Gold Eagle team to be another resource for our growers to inquire about conservation at any stage in the planning or application process of these practices.

Over the last few weeks, my focus has been learning more in depth on the area's challenges with water quality, soil health & opportunities for growth in conservation agronomy.

Our department is in the process of collaborating with other programs for as many financial opportunities to support local farm operations, specifically for those in the Boone watershed, adding edge of field practices and introducing cover crops. My responsibilities will continue to work through these opportunities & expand into communicating with our growers the specific financial programs and agricultural practices that will continue to address Iowa's environmental concerns & support our grower's farm.



Allison Paterson is joining the Gold Eagle team after her recent graduation from ISU.

“

We're proud to host two conservation agronomy positions at Gold Eagle Coop. We want to help farmers make strong decisions for both conservation and profitability.
-Chris Petersen, GEC



water monitoring



Islands of success

Water monitoring doesn't just show us our baseline. It can give clues about what areas can benefit the most from watershed planning, what practices are working, and which ones aren't.



**By Tony Seeman,
Water Lab Service
Manager, ISA, ACWA**

Many Iowans are asking, "Why isn't water quality changing if conservation is being added on more acres?"

It comes down to two things - (1) scale of change needed, and (2) size of the watershed.

ACWA and Iowa Soybean Association have some of the most robust and longstanding water monitoring records in Iowa.

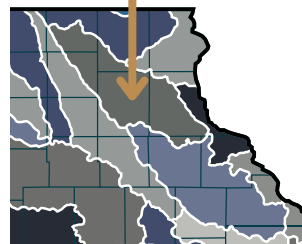
We thought it would be helpful in this summer edition of the ACWA newsletter to explain sub-watersheds, and the data that shows us conservation works.

What is a sub-watershed?

A watershed is an area of land that drains to a single point. Sub-watersheds are smaller in area and many sub-watersheds make up the entire watershed.

Each watershed is given a hydrologic unit code (HUC). The smaller the number, the bigger the watershed. For example, on the left is the Turkey River Watershed - a HUC 8. The sub-watershed is a HUC 12.

Turkey River Watershed



Sub-watershed (in red)

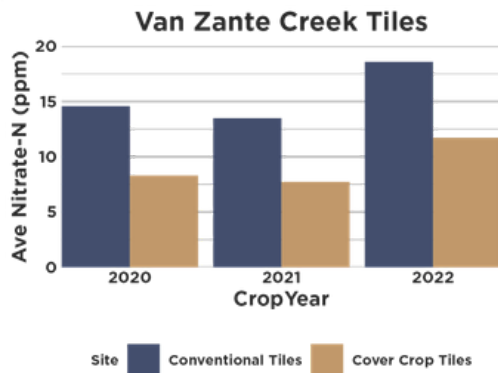


water monitoring

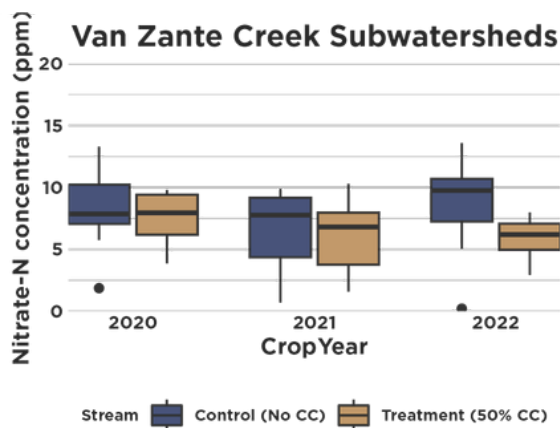
We expect to see results in subwatersheds first because of higher implementation as a percentage of the whole land area, and reduced variability.

Case study #1: Van Zante Creek

Van Zante Creek is near Pella, Iowa. The Water Lab looked at nitrate concentrations in cover crop tiles and conventional tiles.

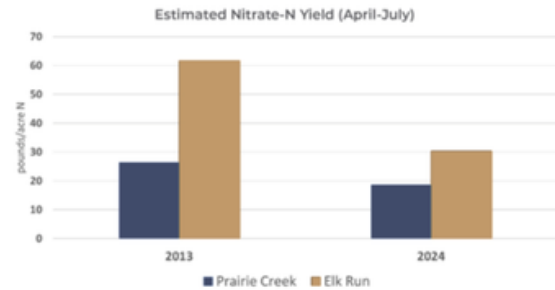


As seen above, over three years, the results were clear: tiles with cover crop acres had less nitrate.



What about at the stream level? Results were also positive. By 2022, the difference between nitrate differences were meaningfully visible between areas with at least 50% cover crop acres and no cover crop acres.

Another area of success is the Elk Run Watershed. Elk Run is the original ACWA Farm to River Watershed.



In the chart above, you can look at results for analog years - meaning similar weather patterns and expected outcomes. But by 2024, there was significant dedicated staff and dollars to Elk Run to implement cover crops, compared to Prairie Creek. The results are obvious. Elk Run, with more cover crop acres, had lower nitrate levels.

According to the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, a winter rye cover crop can reduce N loss by an average of 28%. Even a winter-kill oat can reduce N loss by about 25%.

Paired with edge-of-field practices like bioreactors and saturated buffers, cover crops can have an outsized impact for nutrient reduction.





featured news

Demonstrations do the talking at Heartland Co-op field day

On Tuesday, June 23, farmers and partners gathered at the Luellen farm near Minburn for a field day hosted by the Heartland Co-op Conservation Team in partnership with the Beaver Creek Watershed Management Authority. The event packed soil health, cover crops, and in-field demonstrations into a concise and valuable learning experience.

Ruth McCabe, Jeremy Gustafson, and other presenters opened with short talks about soil health, cover crops, and the Hagie Interseeder, connecting the science of healthy soils to the practical decisions farmers make every season.

From there, the conversation moved to two topics that consistently rise to the top for producers weighing conservation practices: the benefits of cover crops and the cost-share opportunities that help make them pencil out. We heard from farmer host Tim Luellen about his experience using the Hagie Montag Interseeder to plant cover crops and how it's helped him achieve a much more even spread than previous application methods.

The main attraction, though, was out in the field.

Attendees watched a hands-on demonstration of how a saturated buffer or similar edge-of-field practice works, from the Beaver Creek Watershed Management Authority.

Up next - a demonstration of the Hagie high-clearance interseeder, which lets growers establish cover crops into standing cash crops without waiting until after harvest. Seeing the machine work firsthand gave the audience a clear sense of how interseeding could fit into their own operations.

Something that stood out to both partners and guests was the speakers' pacing. Each one said their piece, set the microphone down, and let the demonstrations do the talking. The segments were short and sweet, keeping the energy strong and holding the group's attention and engagement.

As we enter July/August, we look forward to seeing more impactful field days from ACWA members.

Our partner, IAWA, has put together a calendar of upcoming Iowa field days. It can be found [at this link](#).

news you can use

Secretary Naig launches Greater Des Moines Watershed Program, enhanced cover crop cost share in 22 counties

The first phase of the program enhances cover crop incentives for farmers and landowners in the [Greater Des Moines watershed](#), increasing cost-share payments for both new and existing cover crop users to \$25 per acre and increasing the maximum eligible acreage to 500 acres per farmer or landowner. IDALS has a goal to double cover crop adoption across the watershed. [Read more from IDALS.](#)

Start with your goals before choosing a cover crop mix

Mark Licht, Iowa State Extension agronomist, argues you don't "start with a pretty mix in a catalog" and then look for a use. Instead, you decide, for example: "I want erosion control and a soybean mulch," or "I want something safer ahead of corn," or "I want to tackle compaction," then back from there into your selections. [Read more at agweb.com.](#)

Gov. Reynolds signs agriculture and water-quality bills into law

Gov. Kim Reynolds signed several bills related to agriculture and the environment into law Monday, including measures related to water quality, ethanol and the Iowa Farm Act.

It creates the Greater Des Moines Watershed Program with \$3.72 million in annual funding. There's also [\\$800,000 going to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources](#) annually for water quality monitoring efforts, some of which will be distributed through grants. [Read more from Iowa Capital Dispatch](#)

Exploring conifers' potential as bioreactor wood chip source

Hardwood tree species have traditionally been used as a source of wood chips for bioreactors, but could conifers be used, as well? ISU researchers tested 13 species. [See how they rank here.](#)