



# Conservation Insights

Supporting Water Quality Improvements  
and Soil Conservation in Ida County, Iowa

A quarterly publication of the Ida County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
and the Battle Creek Watershed Groundwater Protection Project

Spring 1999  
Volume 2, Number 2  
Phone (712) 364-2124



## School Children Learn About Protecting Ida's Waters

Galva-Holstein (G-H) and Battle Creek-Ida Grove (BC-IG) middle school students recently learned that even small streams like Ida County's waters can be kept clean. Dustin Farley and Eric Phillips, photo on left, show off a minnow they found in the Battle Creek north of the town of Battle Creek. They used the kick net to sample the stream during an Outdoor Classroom activity.

"Dump No Waste--Protect Our Water." That's the message Talented and Gifted (TAG) students from Galva-Holstein Middle School learned in May. They reminded Galva residents that dumping oil, antifreeze and household or garden chemicals down their storm drains can pollute their water. Then they spray painted the message on seven storm drains in Galva (pictured on the right). The students were under the direction of Lynn Davis, G-H instructor, Bob Saunders and Byron Hartwig, BC-IG teachers, and Chris Jennings, Battle Creek Watershed Groundwater Project coordinator.

## Test Rural Well Water At No Charge

Get a free well water test during this rainy late spring or early summer season. If you live in rural Ida County, you can have your rural well water or faucet water tested free.

Call the Ida County Sanitarian's Office at (712) 364-2533 and set an appointment for a technician to come out to your residence. Spring is the best time to test rural water wells. This is because the increased rainfall can carry contaminants into the well so that well problems can be more easily identified.

A clean glass tube will be used to gather a small sample of water as it comes out of your well or faucet. The sample is sent in to a State of Iowa-certified lab in Storm Lake and you receive your results back, usually within 10 days.

The two tests provided will be for coliform bacteria and nitrates, the most common problems for private wells. The sanitarian's office will include a letter, giving you options on how to treat your water, should it exceed U.S. federal government standards for drinking water.

## When Did You Last Pump Septic Tank?

How often should you clean or pump your septic tank?

Once a year? Once every five years?  
Whenever it causes a problem?

The correct answer is: "It depends."

It depends upon its size, how many people are using it and how you use it. This is according to the National Small Flows Clearinghouse at West Virginia University.

"I haven't had any problems yet" is a common response from rural homeowners when discussing septic tank pumping. If you wait until you have problems, it may be too late.

A few dollars spent every few years to properly clean the septic tank is easier on the budget than an emergency \$2,000 to \$10,000 repair bill.

Pumping a septic tank can cost around \$100 and take about a half hour, according to Randy Miller, owner of Miller Septic Service at Schaller. The cost and time will depend upon what problems, if any, are found at the site.

Human health can be affected if your

(continued on Page 3)

# Wastewater Pollution

*This article is the third and final in a series which describes various pollutants, their sources and ways to prevent pollution.*

**By Chris Jennings,  
Battle Creek Watershed Groundwater Protection project coordinator**

For thousands of years, civilizations have faced the challenge of protecting drinking water resources. History is filled with examples of disease outbreaks in Europe and America due to wastewater pollution. As recently as the turn of the century, typhoid fever remained an epidemic in America. Today, most Americans think little about water quality because of improvements in treatment technology and pollution laws. However, in developing countries, many people still struggle to find a safe, abundant source of drinking water.

Poor sanitation causes most water pollution worldwide. Humans learned very quickly that sewage pollutes drinking water, causing illness and death. What is harmful about wastewater?

Wastewater contains physical, chemical and biological ingredients. Physical ingredients are solids, of which about half are insoluble. These give wastewater its cloudy color. Chemical ingredients include nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, organic carbon, and chlorides. Biological ingredients include bacteria, viruses, and other microorganisms. This "slurry" provides the ideal environment for beneficial organisms that facilitate the breakdown process. It also provides an environment for the disease-causing pathogens, such as cholera and typhoid (which are waterborne illnesses).

In America, reliable and widespread human wastewater treatment didn't exist until the 1950's. Today, laws require the treatment of wastewater before it reaches our streams or groundwater aquifers, as well as treatment of a public water source before we drink it. These wastewater and drinking water treatment plants may use different technologies. But they share the same goal: to improve public health by reducing stress on our water resources.

In rural areas, the homeowner is responsible for water quality. Wastewater treatment is performed by septic systems. But drinking water treatment for private wells is less widespread and not required by law. The potential for problems increases, since the soil receives waste and is a part of the process that supplies drinking water. It is not uncommon for a leaking septic system to pollute rural well water.

To protect your well water quality, try these tips:

1. Pump your septic system regularly (see related article elsewhere in this issue).
2. Have your well water tested annually.
3. Consider a drinking water filtration unit.



## Recycle Pesticide Containers

When you finish crop spraying, return them to your chemical dealer or bring them to the Ida County Landfill. This is a collection site, until August 31, for the 2-1/2-gallon jugs. Bulk containers should be returned to the chemical dealer.

Any kind of pesticide jug is accepted, but they must be clean (triple-rinsed) and the labels must be torn off. They cannot be caked at the bottom. Take off the caps and plastic collars or "socks" that cover the opening. Call the landfill at (712) 364-2507 for more information.

## Izaak Walton Tree Honor to Roger Wunschel

Roger and Timi Wunschel of Ida Grove received the Izaak Walton League Windbreak Award from the Ida County Soil and Water Conservation District this spring.

The farm has been in Roger's family for almost 100 years. First, his great-grandparents Nickalaus and Otilie Wunschel purchased it, then his grandparents Arthur and Louise Wunschel, then his parents Marvin and Florence. His parents moved to the Blaine Township farmstead 50 years ago.

In 1980, the Wunschels planted a row of honeysuckle trees near the cattleyard. From 1990 to 1995, Roger and Timi installed the major portion of the windbreak. It consists of Norway spruce, Scotch spruce, red oak, hackberry, blue spruce, dogwood and lilac.

"We like the Norways," they point out. "The Norways are a good, fast grower if they're in a good soil," Roger says. "And the red oak, they're pretty hardy."

Florence adds that the windbreak does cut down on the cold in the cattleyard. The Wunschels note that songbirds have moved in. "It's been a total family effort and we've worked really hard on it," Timi said.

Their farm now will be placed in competition for a regional windbreak award.

**FAMILY FARM--**The Wunschel family poses in their front yard on Noble Avenue in Ida County. From left are Roger and Timi Wunschel, their son Nickalaus, age 6, Roger's parents Florence and Marvin Wunschel, and Roger and Timi's son Keller, age 2.

# Time to Pump Septic Tank?

(continued from Page 1)

septic tank is not properly maintained. Septic tanks that have not been pumped in many years without problems are probably discharging to an open ditch or tile with no treatment.

That's the opinion of Brent Parker of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. He is an engineer in the Environmental Protection Division.

He says that 80 percent of what goes into a septic tank will go out of that tank unchanged. If tanks have not been pumped in many years, the septic tank is doing nothing at all. Everything that goes in comes out unchanged.

Human diseases can be transmitted by untreated septic tank effluent. Surface and groundwater can be contaminated, Parker said. Many more human diseases come from human sewage than from hogs or other animals.

Cleaning out a septic tank is the most important maintenance item you can do, says Greg Brenneman, Extension ag engineer specialist. He gives the following rule:

1200-gallon septic tank  
divided by 100 gallons = 12  
divided by a family of 4 = 3  
equals the number of years between  
clean out. So a family of 4 with a 1200-  
gallon tank should clean out its tank  
every 3 years.

By the time a problem is apparent, the septic system drain field has been destroyed. A new one will have to be constructed,

according to Richard Madsen, Ida County sanitarian.

More information can be obtained from the National Small Flows Clearinghouse's Web site at [www.nsfv.wvu.edu](http://www.nsfv.wvu.edu). The mailing address is NSFC, Box 6064, Morgantown, WV 26506; phone (800) 624-8301.

The Clearinghouse is associated with West Virginia University and concentrates on "helping America's small communities meet their wastewater needs." This group distributes three free brochures about septic tanks and groundwater protection.

Brenneman has written a publication entitled "Maintaining the Home Septic System." It is available from the Ida County Extension Office; call (712) 364-3003.

Another resource is the University of Minnesota's "Septic System Owner's Guide." It is available on the Web at [www.extension.umn.edu/Documents/D/D/DD6583.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/Documents/D/D/DD6583.html). Or phone 1-800-876-8636 to order the \$4.00 booklet. Ask for #PC-6583-GO.

Also see two related articles on this page.

## Monies Available to Help With Septic System Repair or Installation

The Battle Creek Watershed Groundwater Protection Project is seeking rural sites between Battle Creek and Holstein to demonstrate repair or installation of a new septic tank system.

Cost-share monies are available. For more information, call Chris Jennings at (712) 364-2124.

## Why Clean Septic System If Your Home Is New?

If your home is new, the septic tank should be cleaned before you occupy the home. If you have flushed wastewater from paints, varnishes and other new construction materials into the septic system, this can reduce bacterial activity in a new unit. That's why it will need cleaning before you move in and start using the septic system.

Also, clean it again within six to 12 months to be sure it is working properly. Once your septic tank is up and running smoothly, it should be pumped once every three to five years.

## Ida Conservation Insights

The **Ida Conservation Insights** newsletter is published by the Ida County Soil and Water Conservation District, in cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Iowa State University Extension and the Battle Creek Watershed Groundwater Protection Project. The publication of this document has been funded in part by the Division of Soil Conservation, Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship, and by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under the Federal Nonpoint Source Management Program (Section 319 of the Clean Water Act).

This newsletter is free of charge. To get on the mailing list, send name and address to: Peggy Peters, Battle Creek Watershed Project, Box 237, Ida Grove, IA 51445; phone (712) 364-2124; or e-mail: [x1peg@exnet.iastate.edu](mailto:x1peg@exnet.iastate.edu).

### NRCS Staff:

Lorne Miller.....District Conservationist  
Randall F. Sohm.....Soil Conservation Technician  
Carl S. Lee.....State Soil Conservation Technician  
Arlis Bahnsen.....State Secretary  
Carol Thomson.....Soil Conservation Technician

### Battle Creek Watershed Groundwater Protection Project:

Chris Jennings.....State Environmental Specialist  
Peggy Peters.....ISU Extension Information Specialist

### Partners, funding sources, & technical assistance provided by:

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Division of Soil Conservation.  
Iowa Department of Natural Resources.  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.  
Iowa State University Extension.  
Ida County Public Health Sanitarian.  
Ida County Farm Service Agency. Iowa Farm Bureau Federation.  
ABC Ag crop consulting. Agren, Inc.  
Cities of Battle Creek and Holstein. Ida Co. Pheasants Forever  
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service.  
Ida County Soil & Water Conservation District.  
Battle Creek Watershed Groundwater Protection Project.  
Ida County Conservation Board.

## Two Employees Transfer

Two employees located in the U.S.D.A. Service Center office have been transferred to new jobs, effective May 1999.

Jerry Sindt, soil conservationist who has worked in the Ida County office since 1987, now is located in the Storm Lake field office. In Ida County, he was a soil conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). In the Buena Vista County office, he is project coordinator of the Storm Lake Water Quality Protection Project, under the direction of the NRCS.

Barb Knudsen now is working in the Cherokee County office of the U.S.D.A. She is a full-time soil conservation technician with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

Good luck in your new positions, Barb and Jerry!



Protect Our Groundwater.  
Don't dump farm chemicals on the ground.  
Recycle them with the chemical dealer or save for a Toxic Cleanup Day.

# Cami Conover Earns Scholarship

Cami Conover of Holstein is the 1999 winner of the Ida County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) \$100 scholarship.

She is the daughter of Kevin and Lana Conover and plans to attend Luther College in Decorah. The scholarship is sponsored by the Ida SWCD. Her application will be forwarded for state competition, sponsored by the Conservation Districts of Iowa Auxiliary.

## Kids' Art Work Wins Awards

Ida County Soil and Water Conservation District awarded prize monies in the annual poster contest. The theme was "In the Children's Hands."

In division 5, grades 10 to 12, first place went to Marty Hofmann of Battle Creek, second to Amybeth Hofmann of Battle Creek and third to Sarah Burk of Ida Grove. Division 4 winners (grades 7 to 9) were McKenzie Hofmann of Battle Creek, second place; and Nikki Griffith of Holstein, third place (no first place was awarded).

Division 3 included grades 4 to 6. Winners were Morgan Hanson of Ida Grove, first; Tom Hofmann of Battle Creek, second; and Jenny Bergman of Arthur, third. Second and third graders represented division 2. Placing first was Eric Hanson of Ida Grove, second was Luke Griffith of Holstein, and third was Peter Hofmann of Battle Creek.

Michael Hofmann of Battle Creek earned second place for the Division 1 class of kindergarten and first grade (no first place was awarded).

Prize monies were \$10 for first place, \$7.50 for second and \$5 for third place. The Ida District sponsored the local contest. The Ida District, the Auxiliary of the Iowa Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners and Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company are sponsors of the statewide competition. First-place winners will represent Ida County in the area contest. Those winners move up to regional competition and those winners go to state.

### *Battle Creek Watershed Summer Projects...*

to be announced later this summer

-Closing of abandoned wells, public demonstrations in Ida County

-Two field demonstration plots:

Jerry Sindt, Holstein, various nitrogen rates on corn.

Darron Uhl, Battle Creek, Bt corn.

For more information, call Chris Jennings at (712) 364-2124.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension

...and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA Office of Communications at 202-720-5881 (voice) or 202-720-7808 (TDD). USDA is an equal employment opportunity employer.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Stanley R. Johnson, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.

## Upcoming Activities

**July 28-30:** Storm Lake-GIS (Geographic Information System) Conference

**July 28-Aug. 1:** Ida Grove-Ida County Fair

Ida County SWCD  
5973 St. Hwy. 175  
Box 237  
Ida Grove, Iowa 51445

Address Service Requested

Bulk Rate  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Ida Grove, IA 51445  
Permit No. 38