

Brule-Buffalo County Conservation District (No. 03)

History from 1969 publication:

The original Brule-Buffalo Soil and Water Conservation District comprised four full townships and part of four others in Brule County. Additional areas were added in 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, and 1946, and eventually included all of Brule and Buffalo Counties. The original organization took place in February 1938, comprising 115,280 acres.

The Missouri River forms the western border of the Conservation District. Consequently, the topography of the west is undulating to steep and is primarily used for grazing. The eastern part of Brule County contains a lot of fairly level and good farm land. The drainage is to the west into the Missouri River through creeks that also supply water for livestock.

The long time average rainfall is about 18.5 inches with the eastern part receiving more than the west. Lay of the land to the east is such that more of the moisture can be held where it falls.

The first white settlers came in 1882 and by 1884 the land was pretty well homesteaded. Early settlers found an abundance of good grasses that grew so tall that one could not see the cattle when they were lying down; and the quality was excellent for grazing and hay. The more level land was plowed and cropped. At one time more than 200,000 acres were cropped, largely to wheat and other grains at first. Then in the late 1920's corn became an important crop. Then when the dry years of the 30's came along, there was a terrific loss of soil from wind erosion, and water erosion from heavy rains. As the dry years continued, the operators sought help.

The public agencies had little help available. Late in 1937, people decided to apply provisions of the South Dakota Soil Conservation District Law. They organized in February 1938 and by 1946 all areas of Brule and Buffalo counties were included in the Conservation District.

Those who carried the load during the organization procedure were: Frank Benedict, Edward Piskule, Herman Viereck, Leo Piskule, B. G. Ness, Adolph Brchan, Henry Willrott, Matt Brown, and Charles Entsminger.

When the organization was completed in February 1938, these men became the supervisors: Herman Viereck, Kimball; Leo C. Piskule, Kimball; B.G. Ness, Pukwana; Edwin Piskule, Kimball; and Frank Benedict, Lyonville.

The problems facing the people were: wind erosion, water erosion on both crop and grazing lands, depleted pastures and ranges, insufficient feed for livestock, shortage of livestock water.

To help solve these problems, the supervisors received assistance from the Soil Conservation Service personnel. This resulted in better land and grazing management and improvements to land use management practices that are more compatible with the climate, the soil and the topography of the land such as wind and water erosion control by the use of strip cropping, contouring and residue management, reseeding ranges, pastures, and croplands.

Late in 1938, with the assistance from a Civilian Conservation Camp, heavy equipment and operators were available for establishing livestock watering facilities resulting in the construction of several dozen dams and dugouts to store water for livestock and for water spreading.

Other cooperators who served as supervisors over the years are: Frank Hloucha, Emmett Healy, Kenneth Brchan, Nick Tarabetz, William Peterson, James Soulek, Virgil Viereck, Sylvester Falor, Robert Kros, Woodrow Speckles, and Lawrence Bergner.

Updated information provided in 2012:

During 1970-1999, the following were supervisors to the Brule-Buffalo Conservation District: Don Stransky, Ronnie Reimer, Mark Soulek, Eddie Brchan, Curt Foltz, Todd Ashley, Ron Miller, Harold Duffelmeier, LeRoy Ness SR, David Konechne, Donald Lake, Raymond Urban, and David Peterson. In 1974, the Board of Supervisors decided to invite young area farmers to sit on as assistants to the Supervisors. From then they have had three to five advisors who have eventually served as supervisors to the board.

The Board was involved in Great Plains Conservation Program process, helping develop GPCP docket and signing participant agreements. Today, the Conservation District advises on programs such as Conservation, Wetland and Grassland Reserves; Wildlife Habitat and Environmental Quality Incentives; Conservation Stewardship; and Highly Erodible Land plans.

The Brule-Buffalo Conservation District supports awards to producers: Goodyear Award, Izaak Walton League Awards, NACD-Allis Chalmers Education Award, and Soil & Moisture Achievement Award, GSDA Contest, and Soil Conservation Award. The Soil & Moisture Clinic has been reduced to every other year and we try to send producers and students that would be interested in conservation education. Besides awards, the Conservation District strongly promotes and sponsors the education of conservation. During Soil & Water Stewardship Week, they provide educational information to the churches. The Conservation District also joins with other entities to put on local tours involving certain practices. Arbor Day Programs, SD Wildlife Federation Camp, Youth Range Camp, Farm & Home Show, Speech Contest, and Rangeland Days are educational programs for youth that are sponsored by the Conservation District.

One of the main projects that the Conservation District has taken an interest in is Lake Wanalain. It was in March of 1992 at a public meeting regarding Hydrologic Unit Planning for Brule County, questions were raised about Lake Wanalain's spillway, and what should be done with it. It was the consensus of the group to do an engineering study to determine the cost involved with repairing the spillway. Grants were applied for engineering and construction. In November of 1994 the work was finished. The lake was stocked with fish. This lake has been utilized by the public for hunting of water fowl and fishing. In 2008, the Conservation District started working on repairs on the dam, including replacing panels and filling crucial cracks. Funding and support was sponsored by Ducks Unlimited, SD Game, Fish & Parks, City of Chamberlain, South Central Water Development District, Brule Co. Commissioners, and Brule-Buffalo Conservation District. Repairs on this project were completed in October of 2011.

In early 2000's, the Conservation District excelled in tree planting; planting around 300 acres a year. Tree acres are now back to the normal 125 acres a year but every year is a challenge.

Today we provide the following services for trees: Chemical application-pre-emergent, summer, and fall, weed badgering, mowing, machine and hand planting, and fabric application. Other services are custom grass drilling, drill rental, and chemical application and mowing of grasses.

The current Board of Supervisors is Randy Knippling, Steve Reimer, John(Jack) Freidel, Gerald Nepodal, and Larry Wagner. Advisors are currently: LeRoy Ness, Jr., Todd Priebe, Dave Konechne, Marjean Warren, and James Lindley.