

Butte Conservation District (No. 47)

History from 1969 publication:

Butte County is located on the western border of South Dakota and north of the Black Hills, and was organized in 1883. It has long been noted as a cattle and sheep ranching county and produces more sheep than any other county in the state. To the east of Belle Fourche and along the Belle Fourche River is an important irrigation project that has been in operation since 1911. It originally covered 73,000 acres.

The northeastern part of the county drains into the Moreau River via the South Fork and a number of smaller tributaries and the largest portion of the county drains south into the Belle Fourche River through Indian and Willow Creeks and several small tributaries.

The topography of the area is undulating to steep, except in the irrigated area where it is fairly level and all areas are well drained. The soils of approximately 50 percent of the county are Pierre Clay, which is a very fine soil developed from shale. Most of the remainder of the soils are developed from clay and are not quite as fine grained as the Pierre. The internal drainage of all of the soils is poor. That means that surface run-off can be a problem.

Most of the area is best suited for ranching and some cash grain. The irrigated area produces an abundance of alfalfa and forages, as well as, some cash grain. This area did produce a large acreage of sugar beets, but the closing of the processing plant reduced this crop.

In the late 1930's, there was a CCC work camp located at Fort Meade. The men of the camp had worked with some of the farmers on their problems with erosion, irrigation, and land use. When the Soil Conservation Districts Law was enacted by the Legislature, these and other farmers and ranchers saw the advantage of setting up a soil conservation district. A group of farmers from Butte and Lawrence counties who were involved with irrigation decided to set up a conservation district covering the irrigated portions from the two counties.

Petitions for a hearing were circulated in 1940 and a favorable referendum was held in October 1940, covering an area of 225,000 acres, and was called the Lawrence-Butte Soil Conservation District. Additions were made in 1943 and 1944. In April 1948, a referendum was held to divide the Conservation District on county lines. From this time on, the area in Butte County was known as the Butte Soil Conservation District. In 1951, the remainder of Butte County was added to the Conservation District.

The first supervisors of the Lawrence-Butte Conservation District, elected December 1940, were; F.G. Papousek, Belle Fourche, Alex Kling, Belle Fourche, Warren Johnson, Spearfish, James Voorhees, Spearfish and R.D. Long, Newell.

When the Conservation District was divided, the original Butte Conservation District supervisors were, Philip Vallery – Nisland, Chairman; R.D. Long - Newell; T.W. Eaton - Belle Fourche; W.W. Thompson - Belle Fourche, V. Chairman; Urho Jarvi - Belle Fourche, and Howard Geers - Vale, Asst. Supervisor.

The resource concerns of the time were: wind & water erosion, outdated irrigation systems, water logged areas, lack of irrigation "know how" and weeds. The suggested solutions to address the concerns were: land leveling, reorganized irrigation systems, alfalfa plantings, border dike irrigation and stock water dams.

The northern part of the Conservation District is primarily a range area with large cattle and sheep ranches, interspersed with some grain and feed production. Most of the farming is done in the southern part of the county in the irrigated areas, where there are several projects.

The irrigation project consisted of 10 ditch companies, serving 456 individuals and irrigating approximately 63,253 acres. The practices being implemented were conservation cropping systems, farm ponds, farmstead & feedlot windbreaks, grade stabilization, irrigation improvements, pasture & hay land management, range management, terracing, wells, wildlife habitat development and fencing.

Updated information provided in 2012:

Since the last publication in 1969, the advancements in technology, the broader knowledge base of those individuals putting conservation on the ground and the greater understanding of the importance of responsible stewardship by our nation as a whole has allowed for the sustainable use of our natural resources.

The Butte Conservation District goal is to encourage, promote and provide leadership in conservation.

The 1970's seemed to be the decade for improvement, or shall we say, advancements in many aspects of the farm/ranch operations of Butte County. In 1974, the state was facing a tree shortage due to the lack of availability of suitable species for this region and the anticipated income from tree planting for the Conservation District was expected to be approximately \$1000. 1975 marked the first group of 5th grade students planting trees for Arbor Day at Hermann Park, which became a yearly tradition that continues today at various locations. Irrigation, efficient water delivery, erosion control and the publishing of the soil survey were highlights of this time period. Irrigation workshops were held and a 3-part series "Irrigation-An Important Facet of Butte County Life" was made available to the public. In 1977, the wooden flume across the Redwater River was replaced by a siphon, which helped to conserve irrigation water and improved management by its users. Damage from wind erosion also doubled from the previous year's acres, 451,610 acres up from 208,570 in 1976. The publication of the Butte County Soil Survey was considered to be an asset to many agencies, as well as landowners and the general public. The Butte County Task Force developed a rough draft of the Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance to be reviewed by the public; it would become Conservation District Law July 1, 1978. This was a time of new ideas and new innovations; a feasibility study was done on an alfalfa processing plant, the Agriculture Research Service planted 5500 small area grass samples of western wheatgrass and blue gramma and the publication of "Windbreak & Wildlife Plantings of Small Acreages & Home Sites", was made available to promote tree planting as an asset to land stewardship.

The 80's were a decade of progress, historic accomplishments and a combined effort between those that were putting conservation on the ground and those who could get the word out to individuals on the national level making policy. In the early 1980's citizens were called to comment on plans for the nation's soil and water programs. Talks began for state and federal funding to help landowners and homesteaders halt erosion and severe sloughing along the banks of the Belle Fourche River, as it became a serious threat to the Great Plains. By 1985, topsoil erosion was at a critical point, borrow ditches were full in Butte County. Erosion was not the only issue still in the forefront of most people's minds, but also the quality and quantity of our water. 1984 marked the 50th Anniversary of Soil & Water Conservation. With the increase in development, a ground water study was conducted of the aquifers in the Black Hills. The study

provided information on the location of the aquifers, where the water comes from and how are we going to protect it in the future? This was also a time when producers were trying anything to improve forage production and to prevent erosion. Ripping demonstrations on native prairie sod were held. The demonstration plots proved that desirable grass production could be quadrupled, by using this technique. Tree planting and No-Till were also on the list of successful strategies.

Again, efficient water delivery was another concern and many wanted to expand their irrigation projects. In 1984, the Belle Fourche Irrigation District proposed a \$48 million project to rehab and modernize the current ditch system over the next 10 years. Implementation of the project started in the fall of 1984.

Public involvement and recognition of those individuals that were putting their best efforts into conservation were some of the high points for those involved with the Conservation District. Chuck Logan – District Conservationist, wins the Outstanding District Conservationist Award 1985. Betty Driskoll – Teacher, wins Conservation Teacher of the Year 1986. Tim Reich is elected President of the State Association after holding positions of VP and area director and is appointed to the NPS Pollution Task Force. Ree Reich is elected as Vice President of the Women’s Auxiliary and is instrumental in getting the Sammy Soil Saver Mascot to Butte County to deliver conservation education to many students and to promote projects for 4-H and Science Fair. Bill Keiry is elected 1st Vice President of SDACD following his term as area director. Pastor Paul Howard is named Conservation Minister of the Year by SD Department of Agriculture. Marjorie Reder is named Farm/Ranch Woman of the Year 1989. Area students were also making their mark in the name of conservation. Lori Parks places 3rd in State Speech Contest 1987 and Cari Skogberg wins 2nd place in State Speech Contest in 1989 and goes on to win the State Contest in 1990. Not to mention the producers who won the annual Soil and Moisture Achievement Award over the past 20 years.

The 90’s were spotlight years for Butte Conservation District. The Conservation District won the Goodyear Award in 1991 for the outstanding accomplishments of supervisors and landowners. In that same year, Leon Minor won Outstanding Cooperator Merit Award and then went on to represent Butte Conservation District at the 44th Annual Work-Study Awards program hosted by Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. In 1993, Bill Keiry became SDACD President. At that time the major concern for SDACD was securing Conservation District funding to educate producers and the public. Nationally, the common vision was to maintain a productive nation in harmony with a quality environment. As the decade pressed on, the county was looking into an expanded rural water system, and the new buzz was Riparian Area Improvement, along with the continued efforts to control weeds, erosion and water quality/quantity. The Conservation District promoted the grass drill, tree planting and shelterbelt renovation. The Conservation District also began awarding an annual Tree Care Award. Other noted accomplishments, Cari Skogberg, excelled in the State Speech Contest, and placed second in the 1990 National Poster Contest with “The Time is at Hand to Conserve Our Land”. Jerad Schuldies and Trent Giesler won the SD Arbor Day Essay Contest in 1994 and 1996 respectively. Tim and Ree Reich received the National Endowment Award in 1990 and in 1994 won the Society of Range Management - Excellence in Grazing Management. Ree Reich also won the National Distinguished Service Award for her efforts with the Conservation Auxiliary in 1992. In 1992 Chuck Logan retired from the NRCS after 30 years of service, 15 of those were spent in Belle Fourche. Chuck spent many years promoting trees and educating students in Belle Fourche and Newell and was a tireless supporter of the conservation of our natural resources. Appropriately, that same year, Belle Fourche was named a Tree City USA. Tom Quinn was named as the new District Conservationist, coming to Belle Fourche from the Webster field office. The Newell High School

FFA started a tree bank outside of Newell, with the goal of being able to transfer the plants once they were established, to areas in and around the City of Newell. In 1995, the Butte Conservation District was awarded a \$10,000 grant to promote erosion control while increasing forage production and water quality. The USDA introduced a new program in 1996, the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) which replaced the former ACP & GPCP programs. Bootstraps was introduced West River as a grass roots program to address short and long term needs for livestock production, range management, drought preparedness, planning & goal setting, record keeping and communication. In 1996, Conservation District funding was questioned by the county commissioners and ultimately the \$20,000 appropriation was cut from the budget. It wasn't until 1999 that the Conservation District was re-instated to the county budget for \$7500. Tim Reich was elected to the NACD executive board in 1997 and later in 1999 was elected Sec/Treas. for NACD. It was important that our local leadership had a voice at the national level.

At the turn of the century, the Butte Conservation District was making strides in the tree business and rental of a no-till drill. The Conservation District also began expanding services provided to the public. Plantskydd was introduced in 2001. This product, which contains blood meal, stimulates a fear based response associated with predator activity and is used as a repellent for deer, elk and other browsers. Later, wildflower seeds, weed, tree, shrub and plant books were made available, along with cookbooks, rain gauges, soil probes and, of course, trees, fabric and staples. More and more of the general public, in addition to producers began to purchase the conservation grade trees along with fabric and fabric not necessarily just for tree belt purposes but also gardening and landscape. The Butte CD purchased a JD 1560 No-Till Drill in 2001 and later in 2006 upgraded to the JD 1590, which is the model currently in use. With funds generated by the tree program the Conservation District purchased a building in 2002 to be used as a rental property for supplemental income.

Conservation was more important than ever in these changing times, the number of 10, 20 and 40 acre parcels was on the rise, creating more human impact on our natural resources, in particular our water supply. In 2000, EPA rallied to complete TMDL's (total maximum daily load) studies, trying to get ahead of the Clean Water Act. (A TMDL is the maximum amount of pollutant water can receive and still safely meet water quality standards.) Insect weed control, which is the use of biological control (bugs) for weeds, was popular for sensitive and remote areas. The practice had been popular in Pennington County since the early 80's. The Conservation District was becoming involved in several grant projects and one of the main partners was US Fish & Wildlife Service. After several years of drought, many dams and dugouts needed repair once the rains came to fill them up again. The county endured several years of spring flooding, creating problems for many producers, a predicament you can't imagine - all the water you could stand but your ponds, dams and dugouts won't hold it all. Grant funds were made available to help with the repair of these projects. Salt Cedar became the new invasive species along the Belle Fourche River, and the Belle Fourche River Weed Management Area and local Weed & Pest leaders, have aggressively pursued funding to manage not only Salt Cedar but Phragmites as well. Many shelterbelts are in decline across the state and many Conservation Districts are looking into renovations and providing cost-share for said projects. In 2004, the Belle Fourche River Watershed Partnership, which consists of Butte, Lawrence and Elk Creek Conservation Districts and the Belle Fourche Irrigation District began the work of implementing best management practices and improving irrigation water delivery. In recent years the group has been able to provide cost-share dollars to those producers who are interested in making improvements such as switching to sprinkler irrigation or from flood to gated pipe. This partnership has proven the importance of good partners in the conservation effort.



(Pivot installed with funding assistance from BFRWP & an Automated Gate on Irrigation Canal)

Conservation Security Program, introduced in 2006, paid producers for good conservation stewardship. In 2009, the renamed program (Conservation Stewardship Program) updated a list of practices that could be implemented for payments. CoCoRaHS (Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow) network organized in 2007 to collect precipitation data across the nation. Butte CD provided rain gauges to several volunteers across the county who collected and reported data. In the past 5+ years, the Conservation District participated in several tours showcasing successful projects and addressing future challenges. The Conservation District participated in a watershed tour that included several representatives in state government, which provided opportunity to pass on not only our success stories but also voice our concerns to the next level of leadership. Butte CD participated in the Belle Fourche Irrigation District tour, which demonstrated the use of automated gates on the irrigation ditch. The Conservation District co-sponsored with Elk Creek and Lawrence Conservation Districts an Alternative Energy Workshop. In 2010 we hosted the Ag Lenders Range Camp, which highlighted a game farm operation, the reclamation process in the bentonite fields, irrigation district (automation & diversion dam), and a feedlot operation, and Soil Quality trailer demonstrations.

The Hills/Northwest area employees decided in 2010 to meet every other year. It is increasingly difficult to get employees to attend at such a busy time of year. All agreed each meeting would include an informational presentation, discussion of current events and voicing concerns that could be brought to the annual conventions. The main concern, in this aspect of the conservation district, is getting participation from all conservation district employees and developing good opportunities to advertise or promote what we do for the agriculture community as well as the general public. Education is a large part of what we do as well and by getting into the schools on Arbor Day, providing materials for Stewardship Week, sponsoring the science fair and providing opportunities for scholarships and awards, we are hoping to keep our young people interested in not only agriculture but conservation of our natural resources.

As time advances new issues arise. After years of drought, individuals now have to deal with heavy spring moisture that at times delays planting, haying and harvesting of crops. New pests were introduced in the area, mountain pine beetle concerns our neighbors and the emerald ash borer will likely migrate from the east. Conservation districts were instructed to begin promoting different species of trees for planting as green ash substitutes in preparation for the potential borer infestation. Other practices on the rise are fabricated windbreaks and ag waste systems. The fabricated windbreaks are due to the limited number of species that will grow in some of the area soils and ag waste systems are developed in order to comply with EPA regulations regarding the confined animal feeding operations.

Moments in History - In 2000, Newell FFA instructor, Dave Ollila receives the Service to Conservation Award and Bill Keiry received the President's Endowment Award. Pearl Geis, Conservation District Manager, retires after 17 years of service. Jasmine Roberts wins 2nd place in the 2005 State Speech Contest. Butte CD supervisor Jeff Smeenck travels to Brazil in 2006 with SD Agriculture & Rural Leadership group and in 2009 Smeenck and his Center of the Nation Cattle Co are awarded the Society of Range Management – Excellence in Range Management. In 2007, the Conservation District expanded and built a new building to include a walk-in tree cooler (in partnership with Lawrence Conservation District) and office space and provide a warehouse for the Conservation District's inventory. In 2009, the building was expanded to provide more space for the existing lessee. Tom Quinn retired in 2009 as District Conservationist after 17 years in the Belle Fourche field office, but not before receiving an Award of Appreciation from Butte and Lawrence Conservation Districts and the SDACD Award of Excellence for Professional Service. Others who received in 2009 were the Belle Fourche River Watershed Partnership – NRCS Partnership Award, Butte CD – Conservation District Newsletter Award of Excellence, and RESPEC – Service to Conservation Award.

The Conservation District and the community were saddened by the loss of Bill Keiry in 2001, Bill served on the Conservation District Board since 1972 and held area and state offices as well. For 29 years, Bill promoted conservation and voiced local concerns to those on the state and national level; he was also involved in several partner organizations and the community.

Supervisors since the inception of the Butte Conservation District:

Warren E. Johnson, 1940-48; R.D. Long, 1940-76; James A. Voorhees, 1940-43; F.G. Papousek, 1940-43; Alex Kling, 1940-46; George Jeffery, 1943-48; W.W. Thompson, 1943-66; Philip Vallery, 1946-76; T.W. Eaton, 1948-49; Urho Jarvi, 1948-58; Howard Geers, 1948-55; Tom Burke, 1954-58; Preston Hill, 1954-58; Clarence Davis, 1956-72; Vernon Edwards, 1965-66; William Keiry, 1973-2001; William Hannah, 1972-75; Henry Hespe, 1969-72; Robert Pflaumer, 1969-72; Donald Breidenbach, 1973-79; Tom H. DeYoe, 1977-79; Robert Williams, 1978-85; Clifford Bean, 1968-78; Robert Fox, 1976-78; David Winkler, 1982-89; Norman Fenton, 1982-86, Harold Sulzbach, 1985-91; Rich Holman, 1986-87; Raymond Garness, 1989-2000; Dan Heck, 2001-02; Tim Reich, 1979-Present; Leon Minor, 1987-2006; Kenneth Eide, 1990-2003; Marjorie Reder, 1993-2005; Don Liebelt, 2002-Present; Jeff Smeenck, 2003-Present; David Winkler, 2006-Present; Ronald Nenaber, 2006-Present.

Conservation District Managers since inception:

Ivan Fluhardy, T.H. Yound, Dan Wiersma, Kenneth Leslie, Jim Jennings, Ronald Stee, Mavis Ehly, Pearl Geis, Lou Nenaber, Chandi Zimmerschied and Yvette Kirkman.



2011 Board Members (L to R):

Tim Reich – Chairman,
Ron Nenaber – Supervisor,
Don Liebelt – Supervisor,
David Winkler – Supervisor
Jeff Smeenck – Vice Chairman