

Custer County Conservation District (No. 13)

History from 1969 publication:

The Conservation District includes the entire county except the areas within Harney National Forest, Custer State Park, and Wind Cave Park, and covers approximately 500,000 acres.

The topography varies from rough forested areas along the west side to the badland breaks of the Cheyenne River on the eastern boundary. In between these two extremes, the area is divided between four main drainage ways. The valleys along drainages are level to gently sloping. Between the valleys, the topography varies from level plateau to steep rolling hills. The Conservation District west part is primarily mountainous with timbered areas interspersed with open valleys and "parks". Most of the open areas are agricultural lands included in farms and ranches. The additional land in farms and ranches included timbered range land.

The drainage of the area to the east is into the Cheyenne River through several creeks; the chief ones are Spring Creek, Battle Creek, and French Creek, which along with their tributaries and many springs, provide a good source of water.

The Conservation District is in a low rainfall area with an average of about 18 inches per year, with most of it coming during the growing season.

The soils are extremely variable. In the more level areas of the Hills, the soils are composed of alluvial deposits of a silty nature and very susceptible to water erosion. Along the foothills, much of the area is rough and stony and very erodible. The soils of the remainder of the Conservation District are Pierre clays and Pierre loams on the uplands and more silty loams in the valleys. The clays have slow water penetration and are, therefore, quite subject to water erosion. However, all of the soils are very productive with favorable moisture conditions.

The original vegetative cover consisted of good perennial sod-forming grasses, such as buffalo grass, grama grasses, western wheat grass, needle grass, and some sedges. There were also annuals and perennials of lesser values, together with wild legumes and a few shrubs. And in the hills are the pines, spruce, aspens, and many kinds of browse.

Agriculture is primarily livestock and livestock feed production over the entire area. Some cash grain and some feed grain are grown, but not extensively. Considerable alfalfa is grown. There were about 500 operators in the county with units ranging from a few acres to 6,000 acres.

The operators were looking for some way to stabilize their operations. In the past, they were too much at the mercy of the elements – they could not depend on a profitable operation. If they could only utilize more of the water and could keep the land from washing and blowing, that would alleviate some of their problems. And so a group got together and decided that if they had a soil conservation district, they might find a solution to some of their problems.

The Land Use Planning Committee passed a resolution proposing that a soil conservation district be formed in the county, and pledged their support.

A temporary committee of twelve members was set up on July 16, 1940, to start the movement rolling. They circulated petitions asking for a hearing. A hearing was held August 27, 1940, with favorable reaction. The referendum was held November 2 with a very favorable vote. Then on

November 29, 1946, the remainder of the county was added to the Custer County Soil Conservation District.

The members of the temporary organization committee who started the ball rolling were Robert Hughes, County Agent; Joe Fugier; F.A. O'Neill; John Chitty; F. Reub; Bob Caple; Vern Smith; C.E. Pollard; A.D. Miner; Paul Rasmussen; Floyd Miller; and Earl Mohler.

The Land Use Planning Committee members who supported the movement were C.E. Pollard; James W. Soper; Charles D. Philips; Vern R. Smith; Harold P. Kennedy; Guy Caple; Joe. E. Fugier; Ed Hawley; and Charles A. Lander.

The first supervisors were: Paul Rasmussen, Fairburn; Willie B. Clark, Buffalo Gap; Guy Caple, Falsom; Theodore G. Hesnard, Hermosa; and C.E. Pollard, Hermosa.

Others who helped with the organization work were: Sam Wedmore, Hermosa; B.H. Maxum, Buffalo Gap; Theodore Rasmussen, Fairburn; H.H. Streeter; George Darrow; Adolph Sanson; Sam Kirk; Johnathan Waller; Carl Sanson; Dick Westfall; Carl Sandaker; Darwin Pierce; and Jack Markiton.

The problems as set forth in the program of work for the Conservation District were: soil highly eroded in valleys where good land is limited; feed and water in short supply; cover destroyed by drought and hoppers; water erosion and gullies; too much water runs away; need more livestock water facilities; ranges and pastures overgrazed.

The supervisors propose to solve these problems by means of the following practices:

- Improving and modernizing the irrigation systems;
- Save and use more of the water through diversions and water spreading systems;
- Make use of technical help available;
- Use contours and terraces on cropland and some grazing lands;
- Re-grassing of some cropland;
- Dams for livestock water;
- Dams for water spreading systems;
- Better distribution of grazing on range land;
- Build water spreading systems through the use of dams, dikes, terraces and spreader ditches.

Updated information provided in 2012:

Former Board Members

Harry Streeter, Guy Kimball, George Darrow, Sam Wedmore, Charlie Morrison, Johnathan Walker, Ferinard Reub, Adolph Sanson, D. K. Bell, Jack Markitan, Carl Snedeker, C.E. Pollard, Theodore Hesnard, Guy Caple, Willie Clark, Sam Kirk, Paul Rasmussen, Mrs. Paul Peterson, Richard Westall, Gladwin Paulsen, Harry Evans, Darwin Pierce, Dean Shilts, Oakley Hoy, Carl Sanson, Joe Marsh, Alice Allen, Art Richardson, Steve Tymkowyeh, Travis Bies, Duane Lammers, Terry Stombaugh, Richard Rausch, John Rittberger, Claude Smith, Jim Hughes, Brad Baker, Richard Rausch

Current Board Members

Tom Barnes, Denise Baker, Paul Nettinga, Stephenie Rittberger, Dave Thom