

## **Davison Conservation District (No. 55)**

The Davison Conservation District was organized in 1952. Its certificate of organization was signed by the South Dakota Secretary of State on July 8, 1952. This was amended on May 8, 1968 to include all Federal land and cities. Two supervisors were appointed and three elected. The supervisors elected their officers, prepared and signed agreements with cooperating agencies and developed their program and plan of work. The original supervisors were: J. A. Johnson, Stanley Johnson, Harold Kelsey, Donald Rogers and H. B. Goodwin.

After the Conservation District was organized in 1952, there was continuous active resistance and opposition to the Conservation District, which in 1958 erupted into a petition for a hearing for a referendum to discontinue the Conservation District. On June 12, 1958 a special meeting was held for each group involved to present its case. The referendum was held on July 7, 1958 with 454 owners voting to abolish the Conservation District and 450 voting to continue it. A group of landowners took the case to court, contending that the referendum contained irregularities and should be declared invalid. On August 1, 1958, the judge ruled that the referendum was null and void on the grounds that the election was by mail ballot without identification of the voter on the ballot. Persons who were not landowners were allowed to vote and there was no guarantee that some people did not vote more than once. Therefore, the Conservation District continues to operate.

The first Long Range Plan was written in 1973 for the Davison Conservation District. Some of the goals during that time were: to establish vegetative control measures using native grass and plant materials that are adapted to the location to help control erosion, construct adequate shoreline protection, provide adequate funds to purchase equipment and public education. Supervisors who served during this time were Cecil Bainbridge, Pete Schoenfelder, Robert Taylor, Don Williams, John McLeod and Stan Johnson. The District Conservationists were James Hunt and Gary Kruse. County Extension Agents John Maher, Gary Carson and Dick Behm also provided assistance. The first Conservation District secretary, Ardis Schrooten, was hired in 1970 and she worked part-time for 12 years. The first Conservation District manager, Swede Pierson, was hired in 1977 and he stayed until 1982.

Some projects accomplished during the 1970's were: the first Conservation District newsletter was written in 1974, a new tree shed was built in 1973 at the 4-H fairgrounds, tree plantings and gabions were installed for shoreline erosion control around Lake Mitchell. The Davison Conservation District won the NACD Northern Plains Region Newsletter Award in 1978.

In 1986, a new Long Range Plan was developed. Some of the accomplishments during the 1980's were: commonly applied conservation practices which included field windbreaks, farmstead shelterbelts, waterways, grass seedings, ponds, as well as various management practices for cropland and grassland. The RC&D program was very active in Davison County. All of the projects that have been done have resulted in improved water quality and reduced sedimentation and erosion of Lake Mitchell.

Some of the special problems during this decade were: wind erosion, lack of adequate moisture, overgrazing, lack of wildlife cover, flooding of creeks and streams that caused problems in both pastures and croplands, and the depressed ag economy was a problem in the application of conservation practices.

Several projects in the 1980's were a Drive-It-Yourself Tour of common conservation practices in Davison County, an info commercial on conservation tillage advertised on television, a

demonstration plot of trees planted on the Davison County 4-H fairgrounds and the first Clean Tree Award presented in 1984. One of the highlights occurred in 1983 at the annual state convention when the Conservation District was awarded the Goodyear Conservation Award. Also, in 1988 the Conservation District won 2<sup>nd</sup> place at the national level for its newsletter.

Supervisors who served during this time were: Cecil Bainbridge, Pete Schoenfelder, Don Williams, John McLeod and Tony Oster. Steve Vlieger, our current District Conservationist, started in August of 1983. Robert Wagner became the Conservation District Manager in 1982 and stayed until 1989 and Bob Tobin was the Conservation District Manager from 1989 until 1998. Kathi Crawford and Mary Persson were the Conservation District secretaries in the 1980's. The current Conservation District Secretary, Debbie Bartscher, started in 1987.

In the 1990's the Conservation District became more diversified, purchasing equipment: tiller, rear mount cultivator, Tree Row Weeder, Weed Badger, tractor, John Deere No-Till Drill and Truax Drill. A fabric machine was purchased in 1998 and weed barrier fabric introduced.

In 1998, Davison Conservation District, in cooperation with Aurora and Jerauld Conservation Districts and the City of Mitchell, received an EPA 319 grant for Firesteel Creek/Lake Mitchell Watershed Project. The project's goal was to initiate a long-term effort to reduce nutrient (phosphorus) and sediment loadings in Firesteel Creek in order to restore water quality in Lake Mitchell to a level that supports its priority use as a domestic water supply and other multiple uses. David Kringen was hired as a Project Coordinator for this project in 1999. The Conservation District also received funding in 1998 from the State of South Dakota to clean up the James River by removing dead trees.

Supervisors during this time were Don Williams, Tony Oster, Lewis Bainbridge, Darwin Kreth, Herbert Heinert, Dean Strand (replaced Tony Oster in 1994) and Delmar Maeschen (replaced Darwin Kreth in 1998). Steve McClure replaced Bob Tobin as manager from 1998 until 2000.

The prepared their latest Long Range Plan in 2004. They were actively applying conservation by encouraging water quality, grass management, buffer strips, tree planting, protecting soil from water and wind erosion, water development projects, planned grazing systems, animal nutrient management, and rangeland management. They participated in educational meetings for the County producers and assisted in setting up the Firesteel Creek Priority Area.

Long term goals for the Conservation District during the 2000's are: water quality and quantity, Grazing lands erosion and productivity, cropland erosion control and productivity and wildlife habitat improvement and restoration.

The Living Snow Fence Program was first introduced in 2001. The Conservation District has applied for several Conservation Commission Grants for tree plantings, grass seedings, pipelines, tanks, ponds and fencing which do not qualify for any other programs. The highest number of acres of trees was planted between 2001 and 2003 averaging 150 acres each year.

In 2005, Pheasant Country LTD purchased a Truax Drill to donate to Davison Conservation District. The Conservation District purchased a Great Plains No-Till Drill in 2007 with funding from Pheasant Country, Ducks Unlimited and the Turkey Wildlife Federation.

Supervisor Don Williams retired in 2001 after serving for 32 years. Herbert Heinert passed away in 2003 and Delmar Maeschen retired from the board in 2008. The current supervisors are Wade Strand, chair, Bruce Haines, vice-chair, Lewis Bainbridge, Darwin Kreth and Paul Hetland. The current Conservation District manager, Jim Lehi, started in October 2000.