

## Fall River Conservation District (No. 19)

Fall River Conservation District in Fall River County is located in the extreme southwestern corner of the state and the southern edge of the Black Hills. The first settlers to the area were gold seekers who did not find gold, but did find the warm springs of healing waters in 1879. Health resorts were established in the area now known as Hot Springs and the county was organized in 1883. By the turn of the century, there were few homesteaders discouraged by the large cattle companies who occupied the area. Great Cattle outfits supported packing house industry at Oelrichs and provided incentive for the railroad to build into the county. As the land was exhausted, cattle empires began to crumble and grasslands fell to the plow. By 1910-1920, much of the land unsuited for cultivation was being farmed. As the years wore on this land began to decrease in production and farmers began to recognize man-made problems.

Fall River County has a wide variation in both topography and soils. Steep and rolling hills are found in the Black Hills north and west of Hot Springs. There you will find rock outcroppings and thick forest. The remainder of the county is mostly sloping to strong sloping with steep drops along drainage ways. The flat areas are found in the bottoms along the Cheyenne River and other smaller creeks.

There are three general soils areas in Fall River County. The first may be described as the light textured, predominately loamy fine sand, upland soil. They form a relatively narrow band along the south side of the Cheyenne River from the Wyoming line to a point directly south of Hot Springs where it begins to broaden out to cover almost the entire area north of Smithwick and west of Hay Canyon.

The second is the medium textured soils that occupy the valleys of the mountainous section of the county lying north of the Cheyenne River and west of Beaver Creek. Most of the soils were formed from limestone and are commonly referred to as the "red beds". These soils are subject to severe sheet and gully erosion under intensive grazing or cultivation. Run-off from adjacent mountains contributes naturally to the problems of erosion control.

The third soil can be found in the remaining two-thirds of the county, which is considered heavy texture. Topography varies from nearly level to steeply rolling. Erosion is not a significant problem, except in relatively small areas of intensive cultivation. Silting of dams is the most universal problem.

Before the Conservation District was formed, many of the local people were interested in doing something about their water supply and the protection of their land. Surface water was infrequent and the farmsteads needed water for home, livestock and irrigation. By 1930 they planted farmstead windbreaks, did some strip cropping and built stock water dams. In 1936 they went into a grasshopper bait spreading program.

The Fall River Conservation District was organized after the Dust Bowl era forced people to realize that soil and moisture must be conserved if the area was to be self supporting. They began to see other counties take advantage of the new South Dakota Conservation District Law. A temporary committee was formed, an educational meeting held, petitions circulated and on February 21, 1941, a hearing on the formation of the Conservation District was held. Following the approval of the State Committee a referendum on the creation of the Conservation District was held May 12, 1941 in Oelrichs. 260 votes were cast and 231 votes were favorable and 29 votes were against.

Fall River County was the nineteenth county to join the state organization. Clarence E Daech and Earl B Robinson were appointed supervisors on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1941. A certificate of organization was issued to the Conservation District on June 12, 1941. On July 22, 1941, Cornelius Hofman, E.G. Roll and John N. McLain were elected supervisors.

As organized in 1941, Fall River Conservation District area only included 211,840 acres and 218 operating units. In 1944 the remaining area of the county was brought under the Conservation District program. As of the 2010 Census, Fall River County has 1,115,551 acres, 300 farms, 950,000 farm/ranch land acres, and 54,000 acres of cropland which is mostly hay and wheat for livestock.

Some of the first major conservation practices to take place were: contour planting, crop residue management, contours and wind strip-cropping, stubble mulch tillage, irrigation (only on medium and heavy textured soils), grass and hay seeding, proper range stocking, terracing, field and gully diversions, grassed waterways, stock water dams (with trickle tubes), and farmstead windbreaks.

The Lone Well Watershed Project, started by Clarence Daech and John McLain, developed within the county to conserve moisture. The watershed comprised an area roughly three miles wide by nine miles long. Approximately 22 square miles or 14,080 acres. The overall plan was to prevent and slow down run-off to equitably impound adequate stock water and then put the overflow to beneficial use. Once the water reached the main creek, retention and diversion dams with adequate trickle tubes and gates were installed to provide flood irrigation and water spreading on the bottoms adjacent to the channel. Some irrigation is done from Cascade Creek and Beaver Creek. Very little irrigation is done from Fall River, except in the city of Hot Springs.

The largest irrigation project completed in Fall River was the Angostura Project in 1950. Angostura Dam and Reservoir on the Cheyenne River, a Missouri River tributary, can store 220,000 acre-feet of water of which 60,000 acre-feet is used for flood control and the remainder is used for silt retention and irrigation. Angostura Main Canal, with 293 cubic feet per second initial capacity, is approximately 37 miles in length. Angostura Lake has become a large recreation area for locals and tourists. An average of 25 miles around the parameter make this the largest project this far in the county. About 3 miles of the center of the lake is used for speed boat, water skiing, fishing and camping around in the state designated areas. The Conservation District over the years has worked with the State Game Fish & Parks to help develop erosion control, shade and wind protection.

Through the years multiple grant programs have come through the office. In 1993 the Conservation District had a cost share grant program for stock pond development. In the 1990's the Boot Strap group had a cost share program similar to NRCS for well drilling, fence line, pipelines and shelterbelt. 2007 was the devastating Alabugh Fire; the Conservation District got a grant to help landowners purchase conservation trees, reseed native grass and control weeds to start the rebuilding process. Many homes were lost in the fire down Cascade Rd. Fire danger is always a concern in Fall River. 2012 deemed to be another dry year; creating extremely high fire danger. Over fifty individual fires popped up over the whole county. Most of the damage was on forest service land, but 8,500 acres out of the 25,000 acres that burned were on private land. The Conservation District did receive funding for erosion control, reseeding, fencing, pipeline and tanks for quality water to livestock.

The Conservation District has been involved with a few research projects over the years. The Cheyenne River Watershed research project went from 2003 to 2004. The project was set up to

test contaminates in the Cheyenne River on the north end of the county where the river entered from the state of Wyoming. According to the findings not a significant amount of contaminates were found. As a note, this took place over a drought period. Anemometer towers were presented to the Conservation District in 2008. Wind research has been talked about in multiple areas of the county. The State of South Dakota awarded the Conservation District two 50 meter towers and funded \$10,000 for the feasibility study for a period of three years. Data was being processed and monitored by Dr. Michael Rhopp of SDSU. Our results after one year showed very favorable to wind developers. The project ended in 2010 and turned over to a local group, who disbanded shortly after.

The Sides Ranch received the National SRM (Society for Range Management) Award in 2005.

The year of 2012 was a difficult year for Fall River County. Wildfires became rampant, stock dams dried up in most fields, hay and crop ground did not produce, and grasslands have little or no growth for livestock. If it weren't for all the conservation practices already in place it wouldn't take much for another Dust Bowl to occur in the Midwest. Emergency funding from the Federal Government to install wells, pipelines and stock tanks is one step to help mitigate the effects of drought. Smarter, newer conservation practices will also help in tough times like these.

A remembrance of the past Fall River Conservation District board members starts with 1941 original members: Clarence Daech, Earl Robinson, Conelius Hofman, E.G. Roll, John McLain. Other members through the years: Wayne Jackson (22 years), Robert Roller (21 years), Vernon Seger (33 years), E.E. Hanssen (8 years), Willard Benson (3 years), Gary Fishko (9 years), Bill Killbreth (2.5 years), Willie Miller (.5 years), Howard Bailey (14 years), Leslie Heindel (22 years), Hugh Hiller (4 years), Ed Dodson (5 years), Ken Broneman (8 years), Margaret Charbonneau (9 years), John Koller (1 year), Keith Anderson (8 years), and our beloved Clara Clay who retired this year (26 years). Conservation District Secretaries/Managers Vera Miller, Diana Turner, and Wendy Wiemer.

The 2012 Fall River Conservation District Board Archie Collins (chair), John Sides (vice-chair), Dewane Stearns (supervisor), Peggy Porter (supervisor), Mark Keffeler (supervisor) and Julie Tomlinson (conservation district manager). The Conservation District still continues to provide products and services to the area for local

conservation and is always looking for ways to help the community and keep Fall River a prosperous county. We help support range camps and Rangeland Days; provide scholarships, and public education. We also work closely with the local extension/4-H office and Weed and Pest committee. Together we make the county a better place.



Farmstead located in the Cheyenne River breaks on the County's east side.