

Faulk County Conservation District (No. 72)

Faulk County is in the north central part of South Dakota where the annual precipitation is 18 inches. Faulk County was established by the Territorial Legislature in 1873. The first permanent settlers came to the area in 1882 and settled in Lafoon Township near the south fork of Snake Creek. In 1882, John Picker and eleven other men from Iowa came and staked claims. They founded Faulkton. Faulk County was named after Andrew J. Faulk, the third governor of the Dakota Territory. At this time, Lafoon was already in existence and bought the county seat. But in 1886, the railroad by-passed Lafoon and the voters picked Faulkton to become the county seat. The wooden courthouse and almost every other building were then moved to Faulkton.



Horses and wagons building Lake Faulkton in 1935.

The topography of the area is divided into two. The central and western parts of the county are dominantly undulating to hilly. The land has many potholes or depressions and the drainage pattern is poorly defined. The eastern part is nearly level and undulating. Drainage pattern is fairly well defined. The main drainage ways are the north and south forks of Snake Creek & their tributaries. They merge into Snake Creek which flows east to the James River.

The most important resource in the county is soil. It provides a growing medium for crops and for the grass grazed by livestock. Other natural resources are water, sand and gravel, and wildlife.

The Faulk County Conservation District was organized in August of 1967, consisting of five townships: Union, Wesley, Devoe, Fairview and Emerson. The first five supervisors were Dick Fischer, Delano Wood, David Swanhorst, Jerry Miller, and Henry Elsing. They met in Cresbard until they found a place in Faulkton to have meetings. Pete Ochsner replaced Jerry Miller on

the board after the first year. The board's first actions were to find funding to operate the Conservation District. The board's next stop was to petition the rest of the County into the Conservation District. The next big step was to purchase a Nesibitt grass drill for the farmers in the county to use for their grass seeding operations. After the Conservation District got the whole county organized and the office established and operating, the Conservation District purchased the tree planting business from the Crop Improvement Association. After renting different buildings in Faulkton, the Conservation District had the opportunity to acquire some property and built their own building, housing a tree cooler and machinery storage and have their own office in with NRCS in the Agriculture Service Center.

The board specified that major problems were: soil erosion, water loss, soil depletion, grass land management, wildlife management, recreation development, agricultural water management, land use, and conservation district size.

In 2003, the Conservation District Board met with the Faulk County Commissioners to inform them they would no longer be requesting any county funding. This was a huge step in becoming self supporting. In addition to a conservation district secretary, in 2005, the Conservation District hired a full time conservation district manager. The manager oversees the completion of many services including chemical spraying, tilling, mowing, drill rental, handplant service, planting trees and laying fabric.

Past, Present and Future Resource Concerns:

In the late 80's early 90's, the majority of Faulk County was native grass or tame grass used for hay and/or grazing. Livestock was an integral part of most operations in the county. Through the years, much of the grassland has been broken up to be farmed. Livestock have disappeared from many farms. With the disappearance of livestock, alfalfa was no longer needed in many crop rotations. Alfalfa has been a critical crop in Faulk County. It not only breaks up disease and pest cycles but it also allows precipitation to infiltrate soil due to the root system.

Future issues that we may be dealing with include increased tillage and drainage. With the recent wet cycle that we are currently in, many producers are considering tiling to improve drainage. The wet cycle has also increased tillage on cropland due to the fact that producers want to dry their soil out in order for timely planting. This increased tillage may result in increased erosion rates from both wind and water.

Others who have served on the board over the years are: Charles Walker, Roger Melius, Jerry Gilmour, Gene Toennies, Hal Poindexter, Rick Rausch, Matthew Schulte, Milton Heller, Steve Roseland, Kurt Holt, Peggy Melius, Royce Roberts, George Stevenson, Norbie Reuer, and Don Brewer.