

## **Grant County Conservation District (No.42)**

Grant County is located in the northeast corner of South Dakota. It borders Minnesota on the east and is one county south from the North Dakota line. Most of the drainage flows east into the Minnesota River – except the Sioux River which flows south through the west part of the county and drains that area. A range of glacial hills, Coteau des Prairies, passes through the county from the southeast to the northwest. The topography of this area is from undulating to rolling of well drained loamy soils. The area to the east of these hills occupies a large portion and is nearly level to rolling with well drained loams and clay loams. To the west the lands are sloping, well drained silty clay loams, silt loams and loams. The rougher lands are best suited for grazing and livestock farming, while the other lands are well suited for general farming with cash grains and cultivated crops.

Interest in a soil and water conservation district was first shown among the farmers in Grant County in 1946. Many of the farmers realized the need for soil and water conservation on their own. Some inquiries were made to the county agent and the Production and Marketing Administration. Interest continued to develop under the education program of the county agent during 1946 and 1947. Interest was the greatest in the west half of the county.

Some of the interested parties who took an active part in circulating of petitions and in other general activities to promote the Conservation District were: L.C. Gooch, South Shore; Melvin Sieverson, Milbank; Harry Hicks, Marvin; Arthur Nelson, Strandburg; Henry Eidet, Ortle; Lloyd Kneeland, Summit; and Fred Dosch, County Agent, Milbank.

The hearing for the establishment of the Conservation District was held at the court house in Milbank, South Dakota on March 10, 1947. At this time the Conservation District boundaries were set to include only the west ten townships of the county. This was an area of 211,505 acres, containing 650 separate farm units.

All of the county area was not included in the Conservation District boundaries, because it was felt that the interest was not great enough in the eastern half of the county and this might give an unfavorable vote if distributed over the entire county. There was no direct opposition to the organization of the Conservation District, just a lack of interest in the eastern part of the county.

On September 26, 1947, a referendum was conducted, resulting in a favorable vote of 90 percent. Lloyd Kneeland of Summit and Harry Hicks of Marvin were the two supervisors appointed by the State Soil Conservation Committee on September 27, 1947. A certificate of organization was issued by the South Dakota Secretary of State on October 24, 1947.

An election was held on December 20, 1947, to elect three more supervisors to work with Mr. Kneeland and Mr. Hicks, the appointed supervisors. As a result of this election, the following members were elected: Henry Eidet, Ortle; John C. Nelson, Strandburg; and Leslie Stark, South Shore. All five supervisors were farmers.

The first meeting of the new board was held at Marvin, South Dakota, in the Town Hall on the east side of Main Street on December 30, 1947. At this meeting the following members were elected to office: Lloyd Kneeland, Chairman; Harry Hicks, Vice-Chairman; Leslie Stark, Treasurer. Vern Beare, the new County Agent was elected permanent secretary for the board although he had not as yet taken over his duties in the county.

In accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, one technician, Calvin D. Oamek, was assigned to assist the supervisors. The U.S. Soil

Conservation Service office was set up with the County Agent's office in the Court House at Milbank on February 8, 1948.

After three years of operation, a referendum to add the remainder of the county to the Conservation District was held December 28, 1950, with approximately 90% favorable vote.

After the enlargement of the Conservation District, three assistant supervisors were asked to assist the supervisors. They were Bernard Van Stralen, Marvin Knopf and Loren Steinlicht.

Town sites and Federal lands were taken into the Conservation District at a hearing on June 15, 1966.

In April, 1980, the office moved to a new location, which consolidated the federal USDA services of Soil Conservation Service, Farmers Home Administration and Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service. This move made it easier for farmers to obtain information and assistance from the three federal agencies concerned with farm related programs.

The 1984 supervisors were: Gerald Thaden, Marvin, Chairman; Wilbur Letze, Milbank, Vice-Chairman; Loren Steinlicht, Milbank, Treasurer; Loren Tucholke, Labolt, Secretary; John C. Nelson, Strandburg, member.

The Administrative Secretary was Jan Boeger and the District Conservationist Technician was Harley Svarvari. The Soil Conservation Service personnel were: Dale Johnson, Milbank, District Conservationist; Valerie Stanek, Milbank, Soil Conservation Aide.

The Grant County Conservation District promotes the Karst Memorial college scholarship, the Arbor Day Essay Contest for fifth and sixth graders, the annual Resource Conservation Speech Contest for ninth through twelfth graders, the Arbor Day National Poster Contest for fifth graders, the annual Big Sioux Water Festival held at SDSU, the annual Land and Range Judging contest and the annual Coteau Area Legislative Dinner. Arbor Day programs are presented for all second graders in Grant County schools and materials are distributed to all Grant County churches in observance of Soil Stewardship Week.

The Grant County Conservation District worked with a wide variety of partners from 2002-2003 to generate over \$500,000.00 of funds and services for conservation work throughout northeastern South Dakota. The issue of grassland and water conservation throughout northeastern South Dakota was identified as a conservation matter of mutual concern for a variety of partners. The partners included Ducks Unlimited; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks; and the Day, Codington, Deuel and Roberts Conservation Districts. Each of these partners added funds, services and expertise and the "Prairie Coteau Conservation Project" began. During that time eighty (80) landowners were able to restore 1,300 acres of grassland, implement grazing management on 10,000 acres of grassland and develop 39 multiple purpose ponds – yielding conservation benefits for generations to come!

Services provided by Grant County Conservation District include tree planting, installation of synthetic fabric weed suppressant, site preparation, site maintenance (mowing between fabric rows) and grass seeding. The Conservation District also maintains and updates its own website.

Current board members and staff are:

Roger Steuck, Landowner/Occupier, Summit; Gerald Thaden, Landowner/Occupier, Marvin; Ronald Meister, Landowner/Occupier, Milbank; Theodore Holcher, Urban Member, Milbank;

Tellus Waddell, Taxpayer of Real Property, Marvin; Wayne Fritz, Conservation District Manager, Milbank; Matt Hubers, NRCS District Conservationist; Nichole Bury, Ultima/Administrative Secretary.

Grant County Conservation District Supervisors

Gene Mann	?	Loren Tucholke	1981-1994
Henry Eidet	1947	Wayne Fritz	1995-2004
Lloyd Kneeland	1947-1950	Dale Zirbel	1995
Leslie Stark	1947-1952	Ronald Meister	1995-Present
Edwin Olson	1950-1957	Gerald Thaden	1977-Present
Harvey Kneeland	1957-1964	Wilbur Letze	1973-2008
Harry Hicks	1947-1976	Loren Steinlicht	1949-2011
Jerome Lacher	1973-1976	Roger Steuck	2004-Present
Lyle Kriesel	1965-1976	Ted Holscher	2009-Present
Ingeman Jensen	1976-1981	Tellus Waddell	2012-Present
John Nelson	1947-1986	John Nelson (Advisor)	1986-200
Bob Spartz	1987-1984		

USDA-NRCS District Conservationists in the Milbank Office include: Calvin D. Oamek, Harold L. Stoltenburg, Odelle Greene, Dale E. Johnson, and Mathew Hubers. Other NRCS Employees include: Sherman Sampson, Lloyd L. Jones, Clement V. Kehrwald, Charles W. McDaniel, Robert V. Rudebusch, Harley E. Svarvari, Val Stanek, Steve Maras, Cheryl Stohr, Joanne Kwasniewski, Gene Boerger, Seanna Rugenstein, Michelle Schmidt, David Yexley, Barbara Pearson-Cramer, Deanna Balster, Melanie Dickman, and Randy Schmiesing.