

Haakon County Conservation District (No. 30)

History from 1969 history:

Haakon County is located near the central part of the "West River" area of South Dakota and in the low rainfall belt, where the long time average is from 12 to 15 inches. Until the time of the coming of the railroad, the area was occupied by the big cattle ranches.

In 1906-1907, there was a big influx of homesteaders who rushed in to get land from the Bad River on the south to the Cheyenne on the north. In 1914, a portion of Stanley County was organized as Haakon County and Philip was named as county seat. The north part of the county drains north into the Cheyenne River and the south part drains into the Bad River.

The topography of the county is undulating to steep. The steep areas are along the river breaks and the creeks. The river and creek bottoms are narrow but fairly flat and have been farmed, but mostly used for alfalfa. Some of the steep areas are little more than "shale banks." The large part of the county is undulating. More than half of the total area of the county is in native grass.

The soils of the area are quite uniform. The Pierre clay, which is developed from Pierre shale, occupies the greater portion of the county. All of the soils are heavy and best suited for the production of grass, both native and tame grass and legumes, and some cash grains. However, nearly one half the acreage has been plowed at some time. More than half of the total acreage cropped has been planted to wheat. The biggest problems on this topography are the conservation and control of run-off and maintenance of livestock water supplies.

The South Dakota Legislature passed the Conservation District Law in 1937 authorizing the formation of soil conservation districts at the local level by local people to encourage the wise use of our natural resources. The following year a small group of Haakon County farmers and ranchers began the movement toward formation of such a conservation district in Haakon County. Among the leaders of this movement were M.E. Bierwagen, Leo J. Staben, Nels C. Eckwald, Jay C. Williams and Guy H. Waldo.

With the assistance of the Extension Service, 438,666 acres across the mid section of the county was organized into a conservation district in 1943, after a six to one favorable vote of the land owners. M. E. Bierwagen and Guy H. Waldo were the first two supervisors appointed by the State Conservation Committee. Jay C. Williams, Nels G. Eckwald and Leo J. Staben were the first three elected members of the original board of supervisors.

Two areas were added to the original Conservation District after a two-thirds majority vote by the land owners. The northeast area of the county, comprising of 177,211 acres, joined the Conservation District in 1946, and the south half, amounting to 545,723 acres joined in 1950, bringing in the remainder of the county for a total of 1,161,600 acres.

There was considerable opposition to Conservation District formation in the south half of the county. Some came from large, independent ranchers who indicated they didn't need any help with their practices and wanted to keep federal spending down. Other opposition arose from misinformation and misunderstanding of conservation district purpose and objectives.

Grass was the main resource found by early settlers and through the absence of information on good management practices, or ignoring what information there was available, led to much unwise land use that magnified the effects of the drought in the thirties, setting the economy back to even a greater degree.

The erratic rainfall pattern, from practically none to heavy downpours, created several erosion problems when combined with the tight clay soils slow to take water. They wash easily, which proved to be the greater problem, and they are subject to blowing when dry and bare. At the time of Conservation District formation, many gullies existed mainly in the steeper rangeland of the Cheyenne and Bad River drainages. Most of the natural water holes used for stock water were being cut out or silted in, due to the overgrazed condition around them and to erosion from cropland broken for farming by early settlers. Some stock dams had been built to replace the creek-bed water holes and to better distribute grazing, but farmers and ranchers indicated a need for help in designing and building dams. Assistance was also needed and requested for developing farming methods to control erosion and conserve moisture on sloping farmland and establish water spreading systems on native hay bottoms to build up feed reserves for dry years.

Several farmers had tried widely spaced furrows for range improvement and established terraces and contour farming for erosion control, but these instances were few and far between and help was needed for layout and improvement of these practices.

The cropping pattern did not include fallow and farming and was done with a moldboard plow and disc that destroyed surface cover, subjecting the fields to blowing. In the early 1940's, M.E. Bierwagen and Leo Staben of Milesville began conserving moisture by summer fallowing with sub-surface implements that left stubble near the surface for wind erosion protection. Practically all farming now includes a similar operation.

Many of the other original soil and water problems facing the Conservation District have been or are being solved. Stock dams now average 1-2 per section for good grazing distribution, although long term water supplies, three to four years, are still of concern. Closely spaced small furrows have replaced the widely spaced large furrows of the past and have brought about excellent improvement in range in the past five years. The rate of furrow establishment is now limited by layout. Water spreading systems have been, and will continue to be, in demand for development on many acres of suitable bottom land. Among the more recent practices started and gaining popularity are single row tree plantings and seeding poorer cropland to grass, which has been accelerated by the Conservation District's purchase of a special rangeland drill. A problem that still exists is the control of large active gullies that cut up and isolate range in the Cheyenne and Bad River breaks. These gullies also contribute huge quantities of silt to large downstream structures. The answer may be in the watershed approach, but as regulations now stand, it is not applicable to these conditions.

The men who have served on the board of supervisors since 1943, in chronological order, are:

M.E. Bierwagen-1943-1963	Glenn Urban-1950-1957
Guy H. Waldo-1943-1947	Morris Neiderworder-1952-1959
Leo J. Staben-1943-1949 (Asst. 1950-1959)	Kris Paulson-1959-1964
Jay C. Williams-1943-1946	Ray Zebroski-1958-1965
Nels C. Eckwald-1943-1946	Bernard Armstrong-1959-1965
R. C. Neuhauser-1946-1961	Vern Foland-1961-1973
C.L. Ferguson-1946-1959	Claude T. Berry-1963-1964
Floyd Massey-1948-1950	Gilbert Oldenberg-1964-1975

Updated information provided in 2012:

The 1970's brought problems to Haakon County that weren't new to the area: blowing dust, lack of rain and soil cover and erosion. The answer to some of these problems came in the form of

seeding unsuitable cropland to grass, development of water sources, reduction of soil erosion through fencing for better livestock management, planting of shelter belts, etc.

Some other methods of conservation of the time were contour furrowing which is a process of opening the soil, allowing additional moisture to enter the soil; a perennial grass barrier system which is planting tall wheat grass at 30-60 ft. intervals allowing for almost double the storage efficiency of soil water than that of crop fallow, non-barrier plots; conservation tillage which is leaving protective amounts of mulch on the surface; planting of shelterbelts to provide protection from drifting and blowing snow, reduce fuel costs, reduce wind velocity and add beautification to the land; and irrigation and pipeline installation increased water efficiency in pastures.

Some accomplishments for the Haakon County Conservation District in 1978 are six funded Great Plains Conservation Program contracts; 27,616 linear feet of terraces; 1,490 acres of wind strip cropping; 1,285 acres of rangeland grass seedings; 65 acres of shelterbelt plantings; six stockdams; 175 acres of waterspreading; 3,200 acres of pasture and hayland plantings.

In the 90's, research was done with tree plots to see what trees grow best in the different soils of Haakon County. Trees were planted in 7 sites throughout Haakon County. Fabric weed barrier was used and rubber tires were placed on every other tree in the Rocky Mountain juniper and eastern red cedar rows to see what difference they provided for protection and increased survival and growth rates. With all the research done on these tree plots, the Conservation District made recommendations to producers on what trees grow best and different methods for planting those trees.

In 1996, Haakon County Conservation District decided to print their newsletter, The Conservation Courier, four times a year to help residents be more informed of what the Conservation District is all about.

Throughout the years, the Conservation District tried to get kids and young adults interested in conservation and nature. A few of the different approaches used are: having kids plant trees in the community on Arbor Day, essays and poster contests, visits to the classroom to teach about nature and conservation, a living outdoor classroom where kids and teachers could go to make observations and teach about nature, a butterfly garden, helping kids attend range camps, Youth Range Day with 7th grade students, Women in Science fair, a water festival, etc.

Originally the Conservation District employed secretaries but in 1995 when Tanya McIlravy was hired the title changed to Conservation District Manager. The original secretaries were: Kathy Long, Vicki Fitzgerald, Karen Wenig, Linda Hart, Gladys Kuchenbecker, Judy Heeb, Kim Laber, Marilyn Millage, Kathy Tibbs, Cindy Sinkey, Kerry Hostutler and Georgann Addison. Then the Conservation District Managers since 1995 were Tanya McIlravy, Jenna Finn, Teresa O'Connell and currently Jennifer Jones. From 1999-2007 the Conservation District also hired an Administrative Assistant and those employees were Brittany Smith, Tena Slovek, Tom Paulsen and Amber Rush.

The Upper Bad River Watershed Quality Improvement and Demonstration Project began in 1995 and ended in 2000. The goal of the project was to heighten the awareness of the citizens of the Bad, White and Cheyenne River Watersheds of the values of best management practices to improve and maintain water quality, reduce runoff and sustain the resources of the area and to develop interest of the local citizens in developing watershed projects to treat non-point water quality problems in 3 major watersheds.

The Conservation District also acted as a sponsor for the Waggoner Lake Watershed Assessment Project from 2000-2005. This project was to determine what sources of impairment were to Waggoner Lake and the small tributaries that ultimately drain into the Bad River and how to go about restoring Waggoner Lake.

Haakon County Conservation District provided services, products and equipment to customers to aid in their conservation efforts. At this time, the Conservation District has no-till drills for rent, assists in planting of trees, has trees for sale, fabric weed barrier, deer repellent, flags, maps and other various items to assist with tree planting. Employees currently assisting the Haakon County Conservation District are Jennifer Jones-Conservation District Manager, Scott Brech-tree planter, Arthur McIlravy-fabric layer and Lori Quinn-tree season help.

Current Board of Supervisors are T.J. Gabriel, Chairman; Peggy Parsons, Vice Chairman; and supervisors Marvin Coleman, Pat Guptill, and Tom Parquet.

Past and Present Haakon County Board of Directors from 1969-2011:

Morris Neiderworder	1952-1959	Kim Laber	1987-1992
Kris Paulson	1959-1964	Mark Foland	1989-1995
Vern Foland	1961-1973	Steve Van Tassel	1993-1998
Gilbert Oldenberg	1965-1975	Julian Roseth	1999-2002
Keith Emerson	1966-1989	John Knutson	1993-2002
Don Ferguson	1966-1974	Gary Phillips	1993-1994
Wesley Stverak	1969-1978	Boyd Waara	1994-2006
Tom Fitzgerald	1969-1974	Rudy Roth	1994-2002
Don Poss	1973-1980	Scott Jones	1995-2005
Herb Sieler	1975-1981	Peggy Parsons	2003-present
Donald (Rick) King	1975-1993	Pat Guptill	2003- present
Ted Fosse	1979-1986	T.J. Gabriel	2003-present
Julian Roseth	1981-1992	Tom Parquet	2006-present
Gary Peterson	1981-1981	Marvin Coleman	2006-present
Dan Oldenberg	1981-1992		