

Hutchinson County Conservation District (No. 70)

History from 1969 publication:

Hutchinson County is located in the southeastern part of South Dakota, the second county north of Nebraska and the third county west from the Iowa line. The County was named in 1862 and organized in 1871. The County was settled by Germans who are good farmers, thrifty and good citizens. The land produces good grass, grains, corn and soybeans. The James River passes through the county from north to south and drains the area through its tributaries. All of Hutchinson County drains into the James River except some of the west part where the drainage is into the Missouri.

The topography of Hutchinson County ranges from nearly level to gently rolling to rough. The rough land is on both sides of the James River. The north part of the county is comparatively flat except along the river. The south part is somewhat undulating or rolling' as is the land lying for short distances both east and west of the river.

A silt loam soil covers most of the area. The County's flat lands have a fairly deep dark colored soil and are pretty well drained, except there are numerous potholes. The soils in the potholes are heavier and tighter than the surrounding areas. The soils on the rougher areas are generally a little lighter in color and not so deep. All of the soils are naturally fertile and very productive.

Most of the soils show some signs of erosion, both wind and water erosion. Wind erosion is more noticeable on the flat lands and water erosion on the undulating and rough lands. Water erosion has probably done more damage than wind erosion, but it is less noticeable and less spectacular until it becomes severe. The most severe erosion has taken place on the undulating and rough lands where gullies are beginning to appear. Many years of farming removed organic matter and fertility, resulting in lower yields. Wind erosion removed valuable top soil; pastures are overgrazed. Noxious weeds are a serious problem.

These conditions have shown that something should be done to protect the soil and many farmers were concerned. The county ASC program was widely used and was helpful, but did not go far enough to satisfy some of the leaders. They had seen the work being done in soil conservation districts, and so started a movement to organize a conservation district. Information meetings were held during December, 1949, and a referendum was held in February, 1950, at which the proposition was defeated. A second effort was also rejected. On June 27, 1961, a district was organized in Molan Township. In May 1963, Kassel and Sweet Townships were added. Capital, Wittenbert, Valley and Liberty townships joined the district in 1964; Kaylor, Wolf Creek, Clayton, Cross Plains and Sharon townships joined in 1965. By 1968, all except six townships were included. The additions were all made by petitions.

Those who were very active in the early organization work were: Andrew Nusz, Menno; Clifford Handel, Menno; Ross Howen, Menno; Rueben Handel, Menno; Sam Nusz, Menno; Aniel Handel, Menno; and Denver Parks, County Agent, Olivet. The first board of supervisors were: Andrew Nusz, Menno, Chairman; Clifford Handel, Menno, Vice-Chairman; Roy Kludt, Menno, Treasurer; Elton Schaefer, Menno, member; and Earl Langeland, Menno, member.

They named some of their problems as:

- There were numerous potholes and wet spots;
- Wind erosion had removed valuable top soil and fertility;
- Pastures were overgrazed;

- Erosion resulted in lowered production;
- Perennial weeds were a problem.

The supervisors proposed to meet these problems by the use of:

- Crop residue management;
- Contour farming;
- Terracing the sloping fields;
- Draining potholes;
- Established grassed waterways;
- Weed control;
- Use grass and legumes in rotation;
- Seed grass for pastures;
- Plant farmstead windbreaks and shelterbelts;
- Build dams and dugouts and erosion dams;
- Develop springs and dig wells in pastures.

The kinds of practices used and units applied at the close of 1968 are:

Contour strip cropping	400	acres
Contour farming	1,338	acres
Contour furrowing	1,470	acres
Terraces, gradient	73,716	feet
Terraces, level	100,235	feet
Terraces, flat channel	11,800	feet
Range wells	85	
Spring developments	8	
Stock dams and dugouts	531	
Grassed waterways	168	acres
Farmstead windbreaks	514	acres
Field windbreaks	130	acres
Diversions	22,120	feet
Grade stabilization dams	25	
Pasture planting	3,500	acres
Wildlife watering facilities	11	

Others who have served as supervisors are: Gideon Bender, Menno; Howard Preheim, Freeman; and Donald Deters, Menno.

The 1969 supervisors were: Andrew Nusz, Menno, Chairman; Harley Christensen, Menno, Vice-Chairman; Clifford Handel, Menno, Treasurer; Donald Deters, Menno, Supervisor; Gideon Bender, Menno, Assistant Supervisor; Victor Melhaf, Menno, Assistant Supervisor; Harold Tride, Parkston, Assistant Supervisor; and Denver Parks, Menno, County Agent, Secretary.

Updated information provided in 2012:

The last report on Hutchinson Conservation District was in 1969 and this report will be to December 31, 2011. Needless to say many things have changed since that writing. Our Conservation District became a "Full Service District" in 2002 and we want to provide services to our producers who are no longer on the farm or in South Dakota. Tree planting is what started our Conservation District and now that has grown to laying fabric, chemical application, weed badgering, seeding of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres, mowing weeds in

CRP fields, power tilling for tree planting, selling grass seed, providing tree protectors and just whatever the producer would need help with. Our largest year of tree planting came in 2000 when we helped clean up the James River of debris. Then Governor, Bill Janklow, asked the conservation districts along river if we would help with the clean-up project and this added acres of tree planting for us. Along with the tree planting, fabric laid over the trees became an important part of our business. The cost-share provided by the federal government encouraged producers to enroll their wet and less productive acres in government programs for 10 to 15 years. Our largest acres of grass seeding came in 2011 when we seeded over 4,500 acres to CRP, CREP, alfalfa and cattle pasture mix. As our work load increased so did the demand for additional machinery. In 1969 the Conservation District rented a tractor to do the tree planting. The Conservation District purchased their first new tractor in 1990, a 585 Case International. With the work load increasing, a second tractor was needed and with donations from Menno State Bank, Merchants State Bank and First National Bank of Freeman, a used 350 International was purchased. Today your Conservation District owns seven tractors with three of them being 4-wheel drive tractors. The first 4-wheel drive tractor was a JX95 Case International and was purchased in 2004. Not only did the Conservation District purchase tractors, but they purchased their first new 10-foot Truax drill in 1984 and five more Truax grass drills were purchased later. A single row mounted tree planter was built by Walter Welding of Menno in 1998, and a two row tree planter was built locally in 2003. Two fabric machines that can lay 6-foot wide fabric, two 4-wheelers to apply chemical, a truck to apply chemical, a chisel plow to work sod, a power tiller and two mowers to control weeds were also purchased.

This might seem like a very big change for Hutchinson Conservation District but there are other factors that entered in during this period of time. In the mid 90's the federal government decided to co-locate their USDA (NRCS and FSA) offices. At this time, FSA was located in Parkston and NRCS was located in Menno along with Hutchinson Conservation District. The Conservation District was invited to join NRCS and FSA in their new offices in Parkston. This was a big decision for the supervisors if they wanted to move. After much discussion, the supervisors voted to remain in Menno. Several factors were involved in their discussion to stay in Menno but the most important factor was their tree cooler. The Board had invested money in building their own tree cooler and moving to Parkston just added expense for another tree cooler. Now that the Conservation District was staying in Menno, they needed a building for their office. Several ideas were presented and finally it was decided to ask the County Commissioners if we could build an office on their property by the Highway Shop. The Commissioners said we could use the garage they owned by the highway shop but the Conservation District would have to do all renovation work. The Conservation District supervisors said that this was a good idea and the workers began cleaning out the old garage. During the winter months the manager completely renovated this building into an office. The overhead garage door is now a picture window. The tree cooler compressor was moved outdoors, carpets were laid, a small lunchroom and a bathroom added. Lights, plug-in, phone jacks along with heat and air were installed and now the Conservation District had their own office. Open house was held on January 16, 1998. On February 14, 2002, the Conservation District purchased a machine shed from Country Pride to store our equipment inside. This building also housed our seed shed and a 17 by 34 tree cooler. A single car garage was also moved in as storage shed by our office in 1997. When we moved to our own office in 1997, internet was also installed and we began using Quick Books Pro for our computer accounting.

As the workload grew, so did the demand for greater insight by our supervisors. Hutchinson Conservation District has been led by a blessed group who had foresight and knowledge for the future. Those who have served as supervisors during this time were: Andrew Nusz, Clifford Handel, Roy Kludt, Donald Deters, Victor Mehlhaf, Gideon Bender, Don Schneider, Elmer

Brandt, Bruce Anderson, Clavin Hagge, Norman Kummer, Clinton Fuerst, Arnold Bender, Doug Stoebner, Alton Herrboldt, Gerald Nusz, Mike Muntefering, Wayne Bietz, Bruce Handel and Mark Schaeffer. There have been two District Managers, Mike Hertz and Allen Gross. There have been six District Secretaries, Kathy Wagner, Cindy Walker, Carla Deters, Kerrie Goehring, Karen Lounsbery and Elizabeth Kirschenman.

The supervisors in 2011 were: Chairman, Bruce Handel; Vice-Chairman, Gerald Nusz; Secretary/Treasurer, Mark Schaeffer; Supervisor, Mike Muntefering; and Supervisor, Wayne Bietz. The current manager is Allen Gross, who also does the accounting and secretary work. Hutchinson Conservation District is also a member of the Lower James RC&D. Our workload changes from year to year. Tree planting is down from previous years when we would plant 15 acres, but now we are down to around 50 acres each year. Grass seeding has really taken over and this has helped the Conservation District with their workload. We also sell CRP and CREP seed to our producers who are planting some of their land to grass. We have tried to keep busy and have added ground preparation for tree planting. If the producer wants to plant trees on sod, we are able to chisel plow that ground for them and also use our power tiller to get a good seed bed. We have strived to make things happen in the past and will continue to do that in the future. We have tried several experiments, some worked and some did not work. What does the future hold for Hutchinson Conservation District is a huge question. With conservation minded supervisors, you can be sure we will continue to have conservation on the land.