

## **Jerauld County Conservation District (No. 31)**

History from 1969 publication:

The Jerauld County Soil Conservation District was organized in 1943 through a referendum held on September 11<sup>th</sup> of that year, by an 84 percent favorable majority. The Conservation District includes all of the farm land in the county and comprises approximately 337,920 acres.

The topography of the area is divided into two distinct patterns by a crescent shaped range of hills believed to be terminal moraine left by an early glacier. To the west of these hills, the land is undulating to fairly level. To the east the land is generally level with intermittent streams and some poorly drained bottom lands. The drainage from the Wessington hills and east is into the Firesteel Creek, which runs from north to south through the Conservation District and eventually empties into the James River near Mitchell. The extreme western part of the county drains into the Missouri River through Crow Creek. The west central area drains into the Missouri through Smith Creek, and a small northeast corner through Sand Creek into the James River.

The soils of more than the west half of the county are undulating, well drained loams, silt loams, and clay loams with some glacial till. The soils east of the hills are undulating to nearly level, well to moderately well drained loams.

The western part of the Conservation District is used largely for ranching and cash grain production, while to the east it is general farming with cash grain, corn, and livestock.

The native vegetation is predominately western wheatgrass, green needle, and the grama grasses. The poorly drained areas have considerable salt grass and other water tolerant grasses, and originally some timber along the streams. These, along with the creeks and springs, were quite an attraction for the early settlers.

The first road built into what is now South Dakota was known as the "Nobles Trail", coming from Fort Ridgley in Minnesota to Fort Lookout on the Missouri and passed by what is now Wessington Springs and was a well marked trail. The first settler came by way of this trail and settled by the big spring, which is now the City of Wessington Springs, in 1876. The county was created in 1883 and organized the same year.

Early settlers, who came west looking for land, liked what they saw of the grass, the water, and the soil and so settled and established their homes here and started farming; at first wheat, then later other grain crops and corn, but largely ranching and cattle on 100,000 acres. These people eventually discovered that the rainfall was not sufficient for intensive grain farming and that the ranges would not tolerate constant heavy grazing. The years of low rainfall brought on overgrazing of the ranges and damaging the desirable grasses. At the same time, the cropland blew badly and when heavy rains came, the run-off from sloping lands carried away much of the top soil and often times covered good grass on the bottom lands or muddied or clogged some of the streams; thus much moisture was lost for growing crops. After several years of these experiences, they decided something must be done.

By the early 1940's much interest had been developed in the matter of organizing soil conservation districts. In addition to the demonstration areas in Beadle County, conservation districts were already in operation in Sanborn on the east, Brule and Buffalo on the south and west, a part of Hand and the west part of Beadle on the north. The people saw the work being done in these areas and they decided that they should have a conservation district.

During the winter of 1942-43, they went to work on the matter, with the Conservation District being organized in September 1943, and included 309,585 acres. In 1964 the State Law was amended to provide for the inclusion within the conservation districts of town sites, federal and public owned lands. In January 1968 the supervisors took the necessary action to add these areas, bringing the total acreage to 340,160 acres.

The following supervisors took the leadership in the promotion and first operation of the Conservation District: Roy Eagle, Wessington Springs, chair, George E. Hodgson, Wessington Springs, vice chair; C.M. Christensen, Wessington Springs; Henry R. Shrader, Wessington Springs; Fred N. Dunham, Wessington Springs, treasurer; Russell Salmen, Wessington Springs, and J.B. Solem, Wessington Springs, county agent, secretary.

As soon as the organization was completed, the supervisors prepared their program and plan of work and entered into agreements with cooperating agencies for whatever assistance they might be able to give.

The supervisors stated their problems as: limited rainfall - - which the people cannot control but should fit their operations into that type of climate; wind and water erosion; gullying on cropland and flooding of lower areas; overgrazed grasslands.

The following practices are needed to meet the problems and have been established to improve the productivity of the land: crop residue management practices to improve soil structure and increase water intake; contour strip cropping and terracing to prevent run-off and soil erosion; Wind strip cropping to reduce wind erosion; field windbreaks for better snow distribution over the fields, reduce evaporation and wind erosion; grassed waterways for safe disposition of excess water and prevent gullies; proper use of range and pasture lands to maintain adequate cover to aid in water intake, reduce evaporation and prevent erosion; water developments such as dams, dugouts, spring developments and wells for the use of livestock, wildlife, for erosion control and domestic use; establish water spreading and irrigation systems to help stabilize the economy; farmstead windbreaks for buildings and livestock protection; emphasis on wildlife conservation. The supervisors also propose to cooperate with and secure assistance from any or all existing organizations working with agriculture.

The Conservation District has sponsored the following contests: Soil Judging Contests for 4-H and FFA; GSDA Soil and Moisture Achievement Contest.

The 1969 supervisors were: Keith Kleppin, Wessington Springs, chairman; James Hinrichs, Wessington Springs, vice chairman; Jens Christensen, Wessington Springs, treasurer; Lewis Thompson, Wessington Springs; Kenneth Kieser, Wessington Springs; Lawrence Carson, Wessington Springs, secretary (county agent); LeRoy Scott, Wessington Springs, assistant supervisor; LeRoy Arhart, Alpena, assistant supervisor; Richard VanDyke, Wessington Springs, assistant supervisor; and George Hodgson, Wessington Springs, assistant supervisor.

Updated Information provided in 2012

“One of our roles as conservation district supervisors is to help farmers understand environmental rules and regulations and encourage farmers to adopt new methods of farming . . . and to become better stewards of the land.” This is a quote from John Swanson when he came aboard as a supervisor in the 1970’s. He also stated “I want to leave the land in better shape than when I got it.”

The other board members serving with John Swanson during the 1970's were Kenneth Kieser, James Hinrichs, Jens Christensen, Lewis Thompson, and Keith Kleppin. The board remained the same during the 70's. Marlys Shryock was hired part time in 1971 for the position of secretary. Marlys was hired full time in 1975 and remained with the Conservation District until she retired in 1999. Marlys still shows her interest in conservation by helping out on Tree Sale Day and has always been an extra hand when we host the Land & Range Judging Contest. The Conservation District has held the Land & Range Contest annually since 1968.

Two active figures in our conservation history were Neil Reff, District Conservationist from 1965-1990 and Soil Conservation Technician L.A. Larson during 1946-1976. Both worked in Wessington Springs until they retired.

The Conservation District has supported itself through the years with proceeds from the tree planting program. The acres of trees during the 1970's were 220.0, in the 1980's, it was 540.5, and in the 1990's the acres were 413.6. During the 70's, 80's, and 90's, an annual appropriation of anywhere from \$1,000.00 to \$6,000.00 per year was received from the Jerauld County Commissioners, which enabled the Conservation District to purchase equipment and expand its services to Conservation District cooperators.

The practices that were being installed during the 70's were dugouts, dams, grass seedings, trees, grass waterways, wind strip cropping, pipelines, tanks, wells, spring developments and waste storage structures.

During the 1980's, the board remained the same except for the resignation of Jens Christensen and the appointment of Ry Moorman. Dennis Scheel was appointed as an assistant in 1983 and is currently on the board today. The Conservation District co-sponsored a tillage conference held in Mitchell, SD in 1982. The Conservation District purchased a tractor for tree planting. They also purchased a tree cultivator. We sponsored a Rangeman of the Year Tour which was held at the Gary Will Ranch. A banquet was held on November 2, 1985 to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the SCS. The cost to attend the banquet was \$5.00 per plate. In 1984, Susie Ross daughter of Glenn and Iva Ross of Wessington Spring, SD was the State Conservation Speech Contest winner, Ross was a senior in high school at the time.

The Burma Critical Area Treatment Measure was completed in 1986 to heal the gully which was eroding the ditch from South Gulch to the entrance to town. 692 feet of the corrugated plastic pipe, 3 check dams, 652 feet of waterway, 400 feet of fencing and an acre of grass seeding were installed to control erosion on the site. Sponsors of the project included the Jerauld County Conservation District, City of Wessington Springs, South Dakota Dept. of Transportation and the Lower James RC&D which cost-shared 80% of the project through the Soil Conservation Service.

In 1987, LeRoy Scott resigned after 28 years of being either a supervisor or assistant. Ry Moorman resigned as a supervisor in 1989 and was replaced by Allen Rasmussen. Lynn Horsley was also appointed as an assistant and remains on the board today. Richard Kolousek was appointed to the board as an assistant in 1989 and also remains on the board today.

The Sanborn and Jerauld County Conservation Districts met jointly once a year for many years. The decision was made December 4, 1989, to discontinue the joint meeting and see how things go. One major project that was worked on in the late 80's and early 90's was the Wetland Inventory. This involved farmers documenting drainage on their property. CRP blossomed

because of the agricultural economy. The practices during the 80's were trees, fencing, wells, stock water ponds, grass seeding, pipelines, wind strip cropping and grass waterways.

The board members during the 1990's were Ken Kieser, John Swanson, James Hinrichs, Keith Kleppin, Allen Rasmussen, Lauren Thompson and Richard Kolousek. James Hinrichs was honored with a plaque for his 35 years of service on the Conservation District board.

On January 15, 1990, a fire in Wessington Springs destroyed the office and some records were lost. Terry Heilman was hired in December 1991 to be the District Conservationist. Ken Kieser retired from the board in 1993 after 23 years of service on the board. Wessington Springs hosted Rangeland Days in 1993. Kari Horsley was hired in 1994 to work in the office as a Soil Conservation Aid. Joan Baker was hired as secretary in 1999. The Jerauld County Conservation District helped sponsor a Nature Trail in the city park. Ryan Thompson worked as a WAE for the summer. The Bootstraps program was presented to the producers of the area to provide them with resource inventories and other tools to assist them as they strive to improve their agricultural livelihood.

In 2000, we planted 100.9 acres of trees, drilled 1137.4 acres, and had 48 CRP contracts 7 EQIP contracts, 40 ECP dugout/cleanouts, 3695 feet of livestock pipeline, 3 miles of fence, 6 livestock ponds, 1650 cubic yards of grassed waterways and 2 wells. There was work started on an Ag Waste System. The Conservation District took bids and built a new storage/cooler building. Joan (Baker) Judstra resigned in October of 2000 and Sue Wenzel was hired in November of 2000, as the new Conservation District secretary.

In 2001, we planted 147.0 acres of trees and drilled 1415.0 acres; we had 60 CRP contracts, 6 ECP dugout/cleanouts, 2980 feet of livestock pipeline, 3 miles of fence, 3 livestock ponds and 2 wells. The Conservation District started to contribute to the South Dakota Retirement System. We bought a fabric machine. Keith Kleppin resigned from the Conservation District board after 36 years of service. Sue Wenzel resigned as secretary in July 2001. Sandy Grohs was hired in October of 2001 and is still the Conservation District Manager today October, 2011.

In 2002, the tree planting program increased tremendously. We had to hire two tree planting crews and two crews to lay fabric. The Conservation District also purchased a 4 wheeler which came in very handy during tree season. The Conservation District planted 352.2 acres of trees, drilled 509.8 acres, had 81 CRP contracts, 1 ECP spring development, 12 ECP dugout/cleanouts, 11169 feet of livestock pipeline, 2 ECP tanks, 3.1 miles of fence and 1 livestock pond. Diana Tong was hired as a full time Jerauld County Conservation District Technician. The board went on a tour of Big Sioux Nursery which they found very interesting. We started to hold our Local Work Group meetings in 2002.

The tree planting was still up in 2003. We planted 308.9 acres of trees, we drilled 540.6 acres. We had 33 CRP contracts, 2 EQIP contracts, 1 WRP contract, and 2.4 miles of fence. We contributed funding to the Twin Lakes/Wilmarth Assessment Program. We entered into a 50/50 Agreement Program with NRCS in which the Conservation District provided clerical and contract maintenance assistance. Terry Heilman retired as District Conservationist and took a position in Nebraska. Donna Tiede was hired as District Conservationist and Diana Tong was hired as a NRCS Soil Conservation Technician in November of 2003.

The Conservation District feels that a big accomplishment in 2004 was when we presented a check for \$33,275.00 to the Jerauld County Commissioners for the last 10 years of appropriations they had given to the Conservation District. We started our own Cost Share Tree

Planting Program for producers that do not qualify for any other tree programs. The Conservation District installed a 5.3 acre demo plot north of town. We have 13 rows of trees consisting of 78 different species with and without fabric on the east end. The west end contains 34 individual grass sites and 17 grass and forb combination sites. This demo plot was installed with the assistance of Big Sioux Nursery, NRCS Plant Materials Center, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, South Dakota Resource & Forestry, DeWitt Fabric, Jerauld County Highway Department and VanDyke Farms Incorporated.



The year 2005 was full of updating to the tree shed. We installed a bathroom, overhead doors and had concrete poured on the rest of the floor. We purchased a Rotary Tiller for working up tree strips. We planted 79.8 acres of trees, drilled 550.0 acres, had 32 CRP contracts, 9 EQIP contracts, 6.3 miles of livestock pipelines, 4 livestock tanks and installed 2.3 miles of fence.

In 2006, we purchased a new Truax Drill and drilled 1026.5 acres. We installed one Ag Waste System. We planted 69.6 acres of trees, and had 19 CRP contracts, 10 EQIP contracts, 6.3 miles of livestock pipelines, 14 livestock tanks, 12.4 miles of fence and 4 wells. US Fish & Wildlife cost shared 3967 feet of pipelines and 4 tanks in Jerauld County.

The supervisors in 2007 were Richard Kolousek, Lynn Horsley, Dennis Scheel, John Swanson and Dave Doering. Tom Grohs with Grohs Fencing installed a fence around the demo plot. We had Lauren Thompson, Richard VanDyke and John Swanson inducted into the Endowment Fund at the convention this year. We had 27 CRP contracts, 7 EQIP contracts, 6.9 miles of livestock pipelines, 14 livestock tanks, 6 wells, and 4.6 miles of fencing. We planted 71.6 acres of trees, and drilled 975.4 acres. US Fish & Wildlife cost shared 6590 feet of pipeline and 4 tanks in Jerauld County this year. The board purchased a 450 gallon tank to use to water the trees at the demo plot because it was so dry that summer.

Dave Doering resigned from the board in 2008. We designed our own "ENTERING JERAULD COUNTY SIGNS," and purchased these signs and signs for the demo plot. We had a lot of interest on our design and many conservation districts have used our design for their conservation districts, also. We installed mail boxes at the demo plot to hold guides for the kinds of trees and grasses. We accepted a challenge from Kingsbury County and paid \$250.00 to help repair the NACD headquarter in Washington, DC. We planted 69.5 acres of trees and drilled 670.0 acres. We had 22 CRP contracts, 8 EQIP contracts, 10.6 miles of livestock pipelines, 1 well, 12 livestock tanks, 13.8 miles of fence, 120 acres of wetland restored. The Jerauld County Conservation District helped sponsor a tour of the Wind Tower Project and our Demo Plot.

The supervisors in 2009 were Richard Kolousek, Lynn Horsley, Dennis Scheel, Rod Huisman, and Lauren Thompson. John Swanson retired from the board after serving 37 years. His replacement was Rod Huisman. Steve Deneke was welcomed as a new assistant supervisor. We hosted the area meeting this year. We received our "Conservation District Cookbooks" and have enjoyed selling them. We planted 44.2 acres of trees and drilled 660.0 acres. We had 24 CRP contract, 11 EQIP contracts, restored 149 acres of wetlands, installed 9.9 miles of livestock pipelines, 36 livestock tanks, 7.9 miles of fencing and 3 wells.

The supervisors remained the same in 2010. We held our 1<sup>st</sup> Rancher Workshop on January 14, 2010; some of the topics covered were Cover Crop, Protein & Mineral Supplementation, Windrow Grazing and Basic Rotational Grazing Concepts. We hosted the area meeting again on June 17, 2010. Dwight Tober with Plant Materials from North Dakota was at our demo plot in September and we spent the day clipping and weighing grass production. Leasing a big tractor has been very beneficial to our fabric laying venture. We planted 33.3 acres of trees, drilled 890.0 acres, had 35 CRP contracts, 22 EQIP contracts, installed 2.7 miles of livestock pipelines, 28 livestock tanks, 7.6 miles of fence and 1 well.

The board supervisors for the year 2011 are Richard Kolousek, Lynn Horsley, Dennis Scheel, Rod Huisman and Lauren Thompson, Steve Deneke and Richard Van Dyke are advisors, Sandy Grohs is Conservation District Manager, Donna Tiede is District Conservationist, Diana Tong is a Soil Conservation Technician. We continue to lease a tractor for the summer. We purchased a new Truax Drill and sold our old one. We hosted our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Rancher Workshop on January 20, 2011. The subject we chose this year were Soil Health "New" Issues and Answers, Skills To Control Your Cattle, Grasses Are Not All The Same, Grazing Ideas That Might Work For You. Tree planting has dropped off considerably during the last few years due to changes in regulations and producers wanting to keep the land production. The Conservation District has provided a number of services over the years. The services we provide at the present time included: Tree Planting, Fabric Laying, Grass Drilling, Mowing, Tilling, and Cultivation. We have always supported the Soil Stewardship Program and provide the local churches with materials. We have always supported the Arbor Day Program and currently collect the essays and present a presentation to the 4<sup>th</sup> graders and give a Black Hills Spruce to each student. We have always contributed money to our local FFA chapter for students to attend the SD Rangeland Days, SD Range Camp and help promote the students that attend the FFA convention. We sponsor producers to attend the Soil Moisture Clinic in Brookings, SD and the Grazing School, held in Oacoma, SD.

Meeting today's challenge of soil conservation is key to everyone's future. We believe as a conservation board we are up to that challenge. Our role as conservation district supervisors is to help producers comply with environmental rules and regulations and encourage producers to adopt new methods of farming . . . and to assist them in becoming better stewards of the land.