

Lawrence County Conservation District (No. 12)

History from 1969 publication:

The Lawrence-Butte Conservation District was organized July 12, 1941, and consisted of that part of Lawrence County lying to the north of the Black Hills Forest boundary and a portion of the irrigated land in Butte County. The first supervisors of the combined Conservation District were F.G. Papousek and Alex Kling, appointed, and Warren E. Johnson, James A. Voorhees, and R.D. Long. The first office was located at the Civilian Conservation Corps camp at Fort Meade. In 1942, the office was moved to Spearfish and in 1943, an additional office was established in Belle Fourche.

In 1948, the Conservation District was divided along county lines into the Butte Conservation District and the Lawrence Conservation District. The members of the first board of supervisors were: Walter Tetrault, Spearfish, chairman; Harry Edwards, Spearfish, vice-chairman; George Jeffery, Spearfish, treasurer; Ernest Rantapaa, Roubaix; and Richmond Jones, Whitewood.

The Lawrence Conservation District comprises all of the non-federally owned land in Lawrence County. The county is located on the western border of South Dakota in the northern portion of the Black Hills. It is bordered on the west by Wyoming, on the north by Butte County, on the east by Meade County and on the south by Pennington County. The elevation ranges from 3300 feet at Whitewood to 7046 feet at Terry Peak. The northern third of the county lies in the foot hills and consists of valleys divided by sloping ridges, which comprise most of the farming area. The southern two-thirds of the area are mountainous and timbered.

The northern part of the county drains to the north and east through Spearfish Creek into the Redwater River. The Whitewood Creek drains the Deadwood area into the Belle Fourche River. Boulder, Two-Bit, Bear Butte, Elk and Box Elder Creeks drain the southern part of the county into the Cheyenne River. Most of the county is covered with timber and grass. To the east and north are areas of heavy clay, best suited for grazing and some alfalfa. Along the lower portions of the creek valleys where the land is more level, the soils range from clay to clay loam where some farming is done. Portions of these valleys can be irrigated.

Orchards of apples, plums and small fruits were started in the early days and expanded about 1900 under the leadership of Dr. F.L. Cook and Joe Wells. For a time apples were shipped to the northern Hills. The mountainous land is mostly timber which supplies logs for area sawmills. Where the timber is not too thick, grass grows which ranchers use for summer pasture.

Approximately 8,000 acres of cropland was under irrigation at the time the 1969 history was written. Water was largely supplied from Spearfish Creek and Redwater River through both private and company ditches. Irrigation was a major focus of the conservation District in its early years. Besides determining how to get water to the fields, there was also concern for the efficient distribution for particular crops. Some of the practices that were implemented for improved irrigation were: land leveling, border dike construction, and drainage systems.

Other conservation practices developed and used during the 1940-1960's were , crop and grass rotation, spring development, weed control, construction of dams and dugouts for livestock water controlled grazing in the Hills, field contours, and terraces. A better understanding of soils was also considered an important accomplishment of the Conservation District.

Others who served the Conservation District as supervisors or assistant supervisors during this period were: Robert A. Eatherton, Whitewood; Henry Lasher, Nemo; James Voorhees, Sr., Spearfish; Charles Wennberg, Whitewood, Henry Frawley, Jr., Spearfish; and Darrell Nicholas, Spearfish.

Updated information provided in 2012:

A long range work plan written in 1965 guided the Lawrence Conservation District for almost 20 years. During this time the Conservation District was served by many supervisors and advisors who took active roles in achieving its goals for public education, conservation planning, pollution and weed control, water, forestry, and range management, and enhancement of recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat. The Conservation District's newsletter was an important public relations tool during this time and was published monthly for a number of years (until 1995). It received a first and second place award in the Northern Plains Region, first place at the 1988 state convention and third place in the national newsletter competition in 1971.

A review of the annual work plan for 1969 found the following items of interest: encourage the use of more pine and cedar in windbreaks, work to develop campgrounds and winter sports, and work with the state Game, Fish, and Parks in developing an insect eradication program to control the "Black Hills Beetle" in Ponderosa Pine. The county allocation that year was \$3,260.00 and the Conservation District sold cement asbestos pipe for irrigation. National dues were \$75.00 and state dues were \$60.00.

Some of the major issues and projects that the Lawrence Conservation District dealt with during the 1970's were identifying and controlling non-point source pollution, the development of the Black Hills Resource Conservation and Development Association, and grazing management practices, especially piping water to stock tanks. Additionally the publication of the county soil survey in 1979 was seen as a valuable tool for those involved in land use decisions. Two forestry concerns of this decade will sound familiar to present day landowners – pre-commercial thinning and beetle infestation. Supervisors who served during this time were Stanton Selway, James Eddy, Leo Derosier, Melvin Anderson, and Cecil Haight, who also dedicated 14 years to editing the Conservation District newsletter. The District Conservationist was Reuben Hoffman who served until 1981. County extension agent, Ray Rezek, also provided expert assistance.

In 1971 the Conservation District hired its first regular employee, Carlene Rosencranz. She worked part time for 15 years, her first office in the basement of the Spearfish Post Office and later in the old St. Onge school house. Some of the major issues during her tenure included developing the Erosion and Sedimentation Ordinance for Lawrence County, completing a resource inventory for the Conservation District, working with South Dakota State University to develop education programs concerning fertilizer and water application, promoting better weed control – especially for Canada thistle, oversight and review of open pit mining permits and surface mining activities, sponsorship of county youth to camps and participation in contests, and the organization of the Belle Fourche River Watershed Partnership.

The 1980's saw a focus on environmental issues surrounding mining and urban sprawl. An EPA Superfund site was designated on an 18 mile segment of Whitewood Creek. Cyanide heap leach gold mining began in the county and the Conservation District took an active role monitoring the operations as well as the reclamation of mining sites. There was particular concern for water quality and the use of native species on reclaimed land. Some of the Conservation District's projects in this decade were a weed cultivation program, the promotion and installation of living snow fences, and road erosion repairs.

In 1984 a new long range plan was developed. Besides mining and water resources, the Conservation District targeted the following areas for attention and action: Hay and Crop Land – promote terraces, soil testing, and field windbreaks, Education and Information – promote youth participation in contests and activities and the Bootstraps Program, Irrigation – promote efficiency of delivery, Rangeland – promote the development of water facilities and weed control, and Woodland – encourage timber thinning on private and public land and the implementation of management plans.

District conservationists during the 1980's were Jerry Nelson, Chuck Logan, and Ellen Reddick, who later was appointed to the board. Other supervisors during this time were Charles Edwards, Cecil Haight, Art Crowley, and Leo Derosier. Lawrence County Extension Agent, Leo Orme, was instrumental in assisting the Conservation District throughout the 1980's. In 1986 the office was moved to the Northern Hills Plaza in Spearfish and Dianne Miller became the Administrative Secretary. One of the highlights occurred in 1988 at the annual state convention when the Conservation District was awarded the Goodyear Conservation Award for 1987.

The decade of the 1990's was a time of expanding horizons for the Lawrence Conservation District. Public outreach, in the form of youth educational opportunities, stakeholder input in the development of hydrologic unit plans, public meetings to assess resource concerns, workshops and tours on tree care and range management, and open houses to discuss the new concept of riparian protection occurred throughout this time. Conservation District services were enhanced when a new tree planter was purchased and weed barrier fabric was introduced. Supervisor Leo Derosier provided weed cultivation with a cultivator he made for use between tree rows. Living snow fences were planted through a Conservation Commission grant and assistance from the Lawrence County Highway Department. A shelterbelt was planted by students at the high school in 1991 as an educational project and for wind protection.

Dianne Miller took the lead on youth education during the 90's giving numerous presentations using the Sammy Soil Saver puppet. She was also instrumental in organizing and conducting the Water Festivals that were held at Black Hills State University and the South Dakota School of Mines. The festivals took place from 1992-1997. 600 4th graders attended the first festival and over 2,000 attended the final session. Another educational program that developed during this time was South Dakota Ag in the Classroom. Miller took the training and gave workshops to local teachers. She later became a board member. The creation of an Outdoor Learning Center for students near the Spearfish city campground was another accomplishment.

Mining and reclamation were prominent concerns of the Conservation District in this decade. Five large scale open pit gold mines were in operation. Mining companies purchased some of their stock for reclamation projects through the Conservation District. In 1997, 263 acres were reclaimed and 13,450 trees and shrubs were planted. Yearly tours of the sites were held and the board was kept informed on vegetative studies, herbicide application, seeding, hydro-mulching, and wildlife.

Western Dakota Bootstraps, a three year program to educate ranchers on management issues, was started in 1995. The Lawrence Conservation District was the administrator for the activities. The Hills Area Conservation Districts and Tri-County Conservation District participated. Each local group determined its agenda and needs and all members received an inventory of their natural resources.

Board member Ellen Reddick was very involved in the Black Hills Resource Conservation and Development Association during the 90's. She assisted in the publication of a noxious weeds handbook and attended the first RC & D national conference in 1994 presenting a paper on

weeds, "Land Under Siege." A brochure by the same name was also published and distributed by the RC & D weed committee. Reddick served on other committees throughout the years and was a representative to the state council. She received the Outstanding Council Member award at the Western RC & D annual meeting in Albuquerque in 1996.

Tom Quinn began as District Conservationist in March of 1992. Replacing long time board members Cecil Haight and Art Crowley were Kim Schultz and Karl Jensen, who both joined in 1995. Leo Derosier and Charles Edwards continued in their service as treasurer and chairman respectively. Ellen Reddick was the other supervisor. To close out the 1990's the Conservation District updated its technology and the first computer generated reports appear in the official records for 1999.

Many past priorities guided the Conservation District into the 21st century, but new opportunities and challenges also arose. The Belle Fourche River Watershed Partnership, which began in 1996 with 4 voting members (Butte, Lawrence, and Elk Creek Conservation Districts and the Belle Fourche Irrigation District), accomplished much in this decade. A Water Quality Assessment Project to determine the overall health of the watershed started in the spring of 2001. The Phase I Final Report was published in January of 2005 and implementation projects to reduce sedimentation and nutrient problems were started and continue to the present. In 2007 the three partner conservation districts received the Northern Plains Region Collaborative Conservation Award from the National Association of Conservation Districts for their successful community based approach to addressing water quality impairment.

The early part of the decade saw drought conditions that contributed to major wildfires. The later years saw a period of plentiful moisture which in some cases resulted in flooding and erosion. The Grizzly Gulch Fire occurred in the summer of 2002 and burned 11,590 acres in Lawrence County. Along with fires in Meade and Pennington counties a total of 24,750 acres in the Black Hills were damaged that summer. In response, the state Conservation Commission awarded a grant to the three conservation districts affected. The Black Hills Fire Rehabilitation Project, which the Lawrence Conservation District administered, assisted private landowners in planting trees and shrubs, seeding grass and treating noxious weeds. Diversion and stabilization structures were also installed. In August of 2005 NACD and SDACD sponsored a congressional staff tour of the rehabilitation work. Lawrence Conservation District supervisors shared information and experiences from a local perspective.

A major shift in the Conservation District's tree planting business occurred in 2002 when Lawrence and Butte Conservation Districts entered into a cooperative agreement to share tree storage space and a planting crew. A refrigerated reefer served as the tree cooler until 2007 when a new, jointly owned facility was constructed in Belle Fourche. This arrangement has worked well for both conservation districts by consolidating space, equipment, and services.

Zindie Meyers became the Conservation District's manager in November of 2001. One of her first major projects involved writing of a new long range plan in 2003. While the critical natural resource concerns that were identified in this plan were much the same as previous ones, the emphasis shifted in some cases. With only one mining operation remaining in the county, reclamation and post-mining issues became more prominent. Education and outreach activities had a more adult focus in this decade with the sponsorship of workshops on septic systems and alternative energy, resource and management tours, and newsletter articles on invasive species. A soil and water quality demonstration trailer, acquired by the Belle Fourche River Watershed Partnership in 2009, is used for both adult and school presentations.

Forest health has been a significant concern of the Conservation District in the 2000's. Two Conservation Commission grants for cost share assistance in thinning private forestland have been undertaken. Mountain pine beetle infestation, which has been a cyclical part of Black Hills history, has reached unprecedented levels with over 400,000 acres affected. Because of the number of different entities and agencies involved, there has been a delayed response in dealing with the damage and spread of the beetles. At this writing the state of South Dakota has begun the Black Hills Forest Initiative which allocates 3 million dollars over three years to help control the pest. The Lawrence Conservation District, along with Pennington and Custer Conservation Districts, has entered a joint powers agreement with the state Department of Agriculture to survey and mark trees on non-federal forest land.

Tom Quinn retired as district conservationist in September of 2009. Replacing him was Sarah Eggebo, the current DC. On May 10, 2006 long time supervisor, Leo Derosier, passed away. He had served the Conservation District for 47 years. Charles Nicholas was appointed as his replacement. Kim Schultz left the board in 2007 and was replaced by John Rombough. The current supervisors are Karl Jensen, chair, from Whitewood, Ellen Reddick, vice chair, from St. Onge, and Charles Edwards, John Rombough, and Charles Nicholas, all from Spearfish.



Left to right: John Rombough, Ellen Reddick, Charles Nicholas, Charles Edwards, Sarah Eggebo, Karl Jensen, and Zindie Meyers.