

Pennington Conservation District (No. 10)

History from 1969 publication:

The location of the Pennington Conservation District is in the far west central part of South Dakota. The Wyoming state line forms the western boundary; Lawrence and Meade counties on the north; the Cheyenne River on the east; and Custer county on the south.

Until 1875, the region in which the area is located was almost unknown to the white man and it was in complete control of the Dakota Indians. Settlement of the territory had been prohibited through a treaty by the United States government and the Sioux Indians in 1868.

In 1876, a group of prospectors came down from the mining country and camped on the outskirts of what is now Rapid City. They decided this would be a good place for a distributing center, and so they laid out the city. Descendants of some of these families are presently living in Rapid City.

In 1877, a new treaty had been negotiated with the Indians, opening the Black Hills. The first three or four years of settlement were devoted almost entirely to the prospecting and mining industry, although in 1877 some of the trail herds of cattle from the south began moving into the area. A post office was established and a newspaper began publication that same year, and the first railroad came in from the south. The railroads came in from the east in 1907.

The topography of the area ranges from undulating to steeply rolling and hilly land, with bands of more level areas along the creek valleys. The drainage is mostly through Box Elder Creek, Rapid Creek, and Spring Creek, flowing east into the Cheyenne River.

The prevailing soil is Pierre clay, but with many variations. The outwash from the Black Hills covers some of the Pierre clay with gravel, sand and silt in varying depths and locations. The soils of the "prairies" and valleys within the hills are mostly of a silty nature, while east of the Hills they are mostly Pierre clay, and in some areas mixed with silt.

The area is located in a dry climate where both temperature and moisture show a wide variation. The average fifty year rainfall is 17.33 inches, with nearly 11 inches falling during the growing season. The average temperature during the same period was 49.2 degrees and ranged from 106 degrees above to 34 degrees below.

The land was originally covered with a mixture of very good range grasses including western wheatgrass, bluegrama, and buffalograss; in the Hills the grasses were bluestem, western wheatgrass, and green needle grass; and in the higher areas, tall brome, nodding brome, porcupine grass, several kinds of needle grass, fescue and bluegrass.

From early homestead days, considerable interest was taken in water conservation and its distribution from any available sources. Water rights in Rapid Creek were filed as early as April 6, 1878. Numerous irrigation ditch companies were organized, some of which were started to provide water storage on Rapid Creek to assure a supply in years of short rainfall, not only for the valley but possibly for use of those operating on the land adjacent to Rapid Valley if some means could be devised for getting water into these lands without too great a financial cost. In 1915 a survey was made of irrigation possibilities. At that time it was proposed that the Iowa ditch be extended which would carry it through the conservation district.

Water shortage has always been a problem in this area and the farmers and stockmen have often been faced with feed and water shortages, and have sought methods of bringing water from the Hills to their farms and ranches through some type of irrigation or ditches. As they studied the matter, they found that the water rights had the available water pretty well tied up.

In 1939, they set up a committee to study the matter of getting water from the Pactola Dam when it was completed. The committee composed of Jens Keilstrup, Seth Hurlbert, and A. E. Nelson conducted meetings and invited outside speakers and sought whatever help they could find and the matter of getting water through operation of the Water Facilities Act was considered. The outcome was that they figured that a soil conservation district would probably be a more effective organization because it represented so many more people.

A temporary committee of seven was set up to assist in formulating plans for a conservation district. They held meetings, circulated petitions and held a hearing in March 1940, and conducted the referendum in July. The organization meeting was held August 8, 1940, and they were ready for operation.

The first supervisors were: George Eggers, New Underwood; Jens Keilstrup, Farmingdale; V.C. Anderson, Caputa; Seth Hurlbut, Caputa; and William Hilmer, New Underwood.

The problems facing the Conservation District as specified by the supervisors were: wind erosion was showing its ugly head as brought on by insect infestations, complete removal of vegetative cover, and improper land use; water erosion; noxious weeds; shortage of water for livestock and for irrigation; and cutting of native timber along the creeks. The supervisors proposed to attack these problems by using the following methods and practices: extensive grass seeding to be done by using native and adapted grasses; farmstead tree planting to protect the buildings, barn lots, and gardens; some field shelterbelts; weed control practices; use of farm practices that protect the soil; build stock water dams and dugouts; use water spreading systems; and affiliate with a ditch company or irrigation system.

The original Conservation District as formed comprised approximately 82,758 acres. On July 14, 1942, approval was made of inclusion of an additional 48,640 acres and on July 24, 1943, further approval was made for 128,640 acres. As time moved along, additional interest in the Conservation District was formed and land owners in the adjoined area petitioned for inclusion. On August 10, 1945, approval was made for inclusion of all land in Pennington County west of the Cheyenne River excepting federal land or land in townsites. Total acres of the Conservation District now amounted to 755,115 acres. In 1963, the state legislation made changes in state laws which enables the Conservation District to expand to include land which previously had been excluded. As a result of this legislation, the size of the Conservation District is expected to be increased to 1,065,587 acres which includes federal land and townsites located within the Conservation District boundaries.

The 1963 supervisors were: Laurance Jones, Rapid City, chair, Earl Litch, Hill City, vice chair; Leo Meyer, Owanka, secretary, Clarence Wisheart, Caputa; and E. J. Carstensen, Owanka.

The 1969 supervisors are: Francis Murphy, Hermosa, chairman; Kenneth Stover, Owanka, vice chairman; Ed Anderson, Rapid City, secretary and treasurer; Harry Marshall, Rapid City; and Harold Cox, Box Elder.

Updated information provided in 2012:

The decision was made to publish a monthly newsletter in 1954. A tree planter was purchased in 1954. Supervisor's In the 50's were: Russel Ferrin, Clarence Wisehart, Ralph Kopp, Emil Carstensen, Lawrence Jones, Earl Litch, Leo Meyer.

The Annual Plan was updated in 1964. This encouraged tree planting of all kinds, such as living snowfence, farmstead shelter/belts, field windbreaks, and renovation plantings. Also, the promotion of good weed control in general, especially in new plantings.

The Annual Plan was rewritten after the 1972 flood to include the Conservation District in the flood program. On June 9, 1972, flood disaster has evidenced an urgent need for Conservation District's to carry out their responsibilities in land use planning and its importance to community development. Planning for the future of the flood devastated areas.

The county allocation for the 70's was \$3,000 per year. National dues were \$75, and SDACD dues were \$60. Some of the most prominent concerns were controlling non-point source pollution, timber thinning, and Mountain Pine Beetle infestations, Dutch Elm disease, and Prairie Dog control. The Rapid Creek Watershed application, water loss in Spring Creek, illegal appropriation of water from Box Elder Creek watershed, and sedimentation on Canyon Lake was studied. Subject of changing the voting precinct boundary lines between East and West Pennington County was discussed.

The supervisor's for the 1970's were: Frances Murphy, Kenneth Stover, Jerry Marsh, Ed Anderson, Harold Cox, Harry Marshall, Lloyd Rypkema, Beverly Perrine, Charles Johnson, and Whitney White.

A Long Range work plan was written in 1980. Following is a list of long range priorities. They are listed in order of importance. First priority is the establishment of erosion control systems on dry cropland. A close second is the proper management of rangeland. Thinning, harvesting, disease and insect control on woodland. Renovation and maintenance of tame pastures and hay lands followed by erosion control in our urban areas.

In the 1980's Tom Quinn was the District Conservationist until 1986. Gene Waterson filled the position. Gene retired in December 2010. The Conservation District newsletter was published starting in January 1984, it is published quarterly. The Conservation District's projects were the Canyon Lake Water Quality project. A grant was received for work on the watershed from Pactola Dam thru Canyon Lake along with funds from SCS. A living snowfence was installed to promote erosion and weed control. In 1988 there was a major wildfire on Westberry Trails. There were 163 fires burning 23,000 acres during this time.

During this time the supervisor's were: Charles Johnson, Kenneth Stover, Harry Marshall, Whitney White, Harold Cox, Walter 'Bud' Jones, Jim Pahl, Kenneth Singpiel, Elizabeth Nash, Tim Stover, David Garrett , and Lavern Ernst.

The Annual Plan of Operation was revised in 1995. The primary objective of the Conservation Districts and NRCS is to encourage and provide technical assistance to farmers and landowners to conserve their natural resources. Major concerns were noxious weeds, especially in the watershed areas, tree thinning for more runoff and wildlife wildfires, prairie dogs, urban deer problems, and downstream water quality. The Conservation District participated in the Lower Rapid Creek watershed assessment project, non-point source pollution control. Farmers and ranchers below Rapid City are greatly concerned about the quality of Rapid Creek.

Pennington Conservation District participated with the Hills Area Conservation Districts in the Western Bootstrap Program. This was a 3 year program to educate ranchers on management issues, it was started in 1995. Each local group determined its agenda and needs and all members received an inventory of natural resources.

Part of the public outreach was participating in the Water Festival at the School of Mines, local speech contests, sending students to the Wildlife Camp and the Range Camp, SD Ag in the Classroom, Aerial Photo contest, Karst Scholarship, Arbor Day contest, Soil & Moisture Clinic.

Mining and reclamation were prominent concerns of the Conservation District. The Board keeps informed, these projects will have no effect on prime or important farmland. In 1998 the Conservation District books were computerized.

Supervisors for the 90's were: Walter "Bud" Jones, William Coleman, Ken Singpiel, Charles Johnson, Tim Stover, Roberta Vaughn, William Aby, Lloyd Marti, Dean Talty, Keith Ham, Mike Knuppe, Suzanne Koch, and Robert Schmitz.

During the 2000's a fabric machine was purchased, a Great Plains 10 ft No-Till Drill and a Donahue Implement Trailer to move the drill was purchased, also a 15'8" x 30' portable building, to house the no-till drill, and a 12'x30' portable building to house the fabric machine and the tree planter.

Four Living Snow fences were designed for spring 2001, along areas of the interstate 90. Producers affected were Lavern and Sue Koch, Don Wiebers, Elmer Simons, and Monte Simons. A 2 year grant for a biological weed control project to demonstrate the effectiveness of and increase the acceptance of biological control of introduced weed species (Canada thistle and Leafy Spurge). After seeing the positive results, there was a need to continue the project, and a request for a 1 year extension was requested. During the project large numbers of the bio-control agents were released on selected sites in 8 Conservation Districts in 2003.

Pennington Conservation District participated in the Upper Cheyenne River Watershed assessment with the Fall River Conservation district as the project leader. The purpose was to conduct natural resource measurements and activities for the Cheyenne River Initial Watershed assessment TMDL study in 2003.

Black Hills EcoRegion project in 2004 addressed the Elk problem on private land in the Black Hills. The project focused on impacts to private landowners. This project was sponsored by the Hills Area Conservation District's work groups, GF&P and Custer State Park. Pennington Conservation District approved the proposal.

The Battle Creek fire in Pennington County along with fires in Lawrence County and Meade County claimed a total of 24,750 acres in the Black Hills. A grant was awarded by the State Conservation Commission to the three conservation districts affected. The Black Hills Fire Rehabilitation Project assisted private landowners in tree and shrub plantings, grass seeding and treating noxious weeds. This project went from 2002 to 2005.

The Owanka Rural Water association was established in 2006. This project provided a deep well for 12 Individual ranchers. NRCS provided technical assistance. The well was completed in 2011.

The Lower Cheyenne River Watershed partnership was established to facilitate a better understanding and appreciation of and education on watershed-related issues and their impact

on the public and business within the watershed. Salt Cedar was an important concern. This project began in 2007.

Pennington Conservation District was proud to announce William Kopp as the winner of the Soil Conservation Award in 2009, this award was created to recognize exceptional farming and ranching practices that conserve soil and other natural resources in South Dakota.

Two Conservation Commission grants for cost sharing in 2008-2010, for forest restoration and tree thinning was established. The purpose of this project is to restore private forest lands to a healthier state that is more resistant to Mountain Pine beetle attack and catastrophic fires. Removal of small diameter trees will result in more water and nutrients becoming available for the remaining trees making them less susceptible to insect attack.

A NPS 319 watershed project seeks to bring Spring Creek into compliance for fecal coliform by implementing the best management practices by 2021. The 2010-2012 project segment is set forth in the Spring Creek/Sheridan Lake maximum daily load (TMDL) study.

2011 began the Black Hills Forest Initiative which allocates 3 million dollars over 3 years to help control the Mountain Pine beetles on over 400,000 acres. Pennington Conservation District, Lawrence Conservation District, and Custer Conservation District entered in a joint power of agreement with the Dept. of Agriculture to survey and mark Mountain Pine Beetle infested trees on private land.

Supervisors in the 2000's were: William Aby, Sue Koch, Mike Knuppe, Keith Ham, Roberta Vaughn, Carol Perry, Mark Kieffer, Jeff Cullum, Bud Ireland, Janice Jensen, and Vern Mascher.

District Conservationist who have worked with the Pennington Conservation District over the years were Herb Simonson, Louis Eberlein, Clinton Currey, Richard Marsh, Tom Quinn, Harold Stoltenburg, Eugene Waterson, with Matt Odden currently filling the position.

Marshall Boline, Valerie Oksendahl, Nell Heying, Kristine Harper, Jay Kruse, Brad Humbracht filled the NRCS Soil Conservation Technician position over the years with Paul Fulton currently in the position.

Past employees of the Conservation District include: Phyllis Walters & Jacquelin Jacobsen, Cherly Heil, Dorothy Einbinder, Delores Coffing, Phyllis Day, Beverly Perrine, Janet Laudenschlager, Donna Burn, Shirley Beagle, Judy Olson, Betty Nash, Jodi Lehrenkamp, and Kathy Veliem. Roberta Vaughn is the current employee of the Conservation District.