

Spink County Conservation District (No. 20)

The Spink Conservation District was organized on October 16, 1941, the 20th Conservation District formed in South Dakota.. It was known as the Tulare-Redfield Soil Conservation District and included eight townships. More townships were added periodically until December, 1947, when the name was changed to Spink County Soil Conservation District. The Conservation District was amended in March, 1961, to include townships formerly known as the Carpenter Soil Conservation District and again in June, 1968, when all the town sites and federal lands in the county were added.

Spink County is located in the east central part of South Dakota and was settled in the late 1870's by a class of substantial farmers from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. They found a land much to their liking because it was fairly level and good soil. The soils of Spink County are rather variable from silty clay loams to loams, silt loams and sandy loams. A modern soil survey was completed in 1996 which was a total update of the 1954 Spink County Soil Survey. All soils information now can be accessed online from the Web Soil Survey.

<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>

The James River flows through the middle of the county from north to south. The topography is level to undulating with some fairly steep breaks along the James River in the southern part of the county. A large portion of the land is quite level with poor drainage in some areas. The Conservation District boundaries coincide with the county boundaries. The county is 42 miles long by 36 miles wide and contains 965,958 acres.

The problems designated and programs set up by the first board of supervisors dealt with serious wind and water erosion, soil drifts and hummocks on the sandy areas, loss of fertility and organic matter, and dwindling water supply. Today Conservation District priorities are public conservation education, water quality, invasive pests-weeds, insects, & disease, soil erosion (water), grassland management, wildlife management, and promoting the use of natural and renewable energy sources.

There were 3,972 acres of trees planted in Spink County from 1944-1963. An additional 7,248 acres of trees were planted from 1964-2011. Those acres resulted in a total of over 6,000,000 trees! The average acres of cropland in our county have not changed much from 1964 (which is the latest information available at this time) to 2010 but many other farm statistics have changed.

	<u>1964</u>	<u>2010</u>
Number of farms:	1,127	624
Average size of farm:	800acres	1,455 acres
Average Land Value:	\$84.00/acre	\$3000 to \$5500/acre
Approximate acres cropland	600,000	686,905
Major Crops:	S Wheat/182,400 ac.	S Wheat/53,600 ac.
	Corn/86,600 ac.	Soybeans/243,000 ac.(1 st in state)
	Oats/60,000 ac.	Corn/190,000 ac. (2 nd in state)
	W Wheat/67,000 ac.	W Wheat/13,500 ac.

In the late 1980's, the Conservation District board wanted to promote no-tilling to save moisture and prevent erosion. They purchased one of the first no-till drills in our County. By doing this, producers could rent the drill to use on their land before purchasing one for their own operation.

Today, the majority of the producers in Spink County have a no-till or minimum till operation. Economics have producers planting more corn and soybeans and a lot less small grain. Until 2000, the Conservation District's main service was tree planting with over 11,000 acres of trees being planted in this county since 1944. Today no-till grass seeding is the service that is most requested from the Conservation District. In addition to the two no-till grass drills, the Conservation District has purchased other equipment to provide many services to the producers in our County. Equipment includes several tractors and trailers, pickups, fabric machine, tree planter, mower, tiller, weed badger, disc, tree auger, and sprayer. We also provide hand plants to anyone. Included in our hand plant sales are seedling trees, large bare root trees, native grasses and native perennials.

Conservation education is very important to our Conservation District. We promote/sponsor or help with many activities. Some activities include grade school presentations, FFA Land & Range judging, water festivals, SD Wildlife Federal camp, Arbor Day presentations, Arbor Day essay contest, photo contests, science fairs, 4-H conservation awards, pasture tours, educational meetings with NRCS and an annual appreciation dinner where outstanding producers are recognized.

One of the special projects the Conservation District sponsored was the Turtle Creek/Redfield Lake Project which ended in 1999. Many conservation practices were implemented throughout the county during the 1.5 million dollar project. Ag waste systems, moving feedlots, alternative water sources, permanent grass seeding, grazing management fencing, exclusion fencing, riparian buffers, bio-control releases and bank stabilizations were some of the best management practices that were installed.

Two hundred sixty-seven thousand cubic yards of sediment were dredged from Redfield Lake with an additional 138,461 cu. yards removed with land based equipment. The 32 acre pasture area that was used for the sediment ponds has been reclaimed and is again being used to graze cattle and horses. With grass seeding, tree planting, installation of a boat dock, picnic shelters, playground equipment and camper pads, the improvement on the immediate public land next to the Redfield Lake now provides a wonderful recreation area.

Another project that has had a large impact in our Conservation District is the 1999 James River Dead Tree Removal Project. The James River flows from the northern border of our state of South Dakota to the southern border and beyond. After repeated flooding along the James River, acres and acres of trees drown causing concern of a potential fire that could have spread through the state. In Spink County, over 40,000 dead trees were removed along the river. During this project, more than 100,000 trees were planted outside of the floodplain to replace some of those dead trees.

Throughout the years the Conservation District office has been housed in different buildings within the county seat of Redfield. It is now in a central building along with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency. In 2002 the Conservation District purchased a 3 acre site located just north of Redfield outside the city limits from Northern Electric. This site had two existing buildings. A tree cooler was installed in one of the buildings. Another storage building was moved out to this site from our Main Street site. Three buildings now store all of our equipment.

There have been numerous District Conservationists throughout the years along with Soil Conservationists and Soil Scientists serving Spink County. Since 1964 the District Conservationists have been George Coutler, Mel Akin, Darrel Bentz, Ken Houska, Gene Vilegar, Elmer Ward, Mary Lou Woolf and presently Shane Jordan.

Fern Schmidt served as administrative secretary for the Conservation District from 1966 to 1991. Then Barb Lenocker was hired as Conservation District manager. In 1998, Linda McLain took over the duties of Conservation District manager and is still presently in that position. The Conservation District has also had two Conservation District technicians; Simon Appel (1999-2000) and Dennis Clemens (2001-present).

Below is a list of supervisors that have or are serving on the Spink County Conservation District Board.

James Dawson	1941-1948	Donald P Jessen	1964-1996
Elton MacNeil	1941-1948	Jake Gross	1967-1982
Walter Tubandt	1941-1959	Aaron J Bade	1973-1980
Phillip Kreimann	1941-1963	Gerald Kettering	1979-1980
Robert Schwichtenberg	1941-1964	Gordon Palmer	1980-1984
Harold Schwenn	1946-1960	Jerry Steger	1981-1998
Oscar Wolner	1948-1963	David Mendel	1983-present
Willis Wagner	1955-1957	Max Williams	1985-present
Layle Evans	1956-1959	Dennis Boyd	1989-2004
Harold Jilek	1957-1978	Donald Masat	1997-present
Raymond Shult	1961-1963	Gary Hearnen	1999-present
Lester Dennis	1961-1972	Simon Appel	2005-2010
Kenneth Wicks	1963-1966	Garrett Rahm	2011-present
Merlin V Hahn	1963-1988		

Serving as the Conservation District advisor is Holly Bottum, who has held this position from 1994 to present.