

## Tri-County Conservation District (No. 01)

History from 1969 publication:

The area of the Tri-County Conservation District occupies a portion of the southeast part of Perkins, and the northeast part of Meade and an area across the middle of Ziebach County, in a 16 inch rainfall belt. The land is undulating to rolling, with drainage to the south into the Cheyenne River and some to the north into the Moreau. There is fairly rapid drainage. There is also a rather wide variation of soil, varying from heavy clay to a loamy and in some areas a somewhat sandy soil. These soil factors, combined with low rainfall, create a situation less favorable for farming and more favorable for ranching.

Before the homestead days, large ranches operated in the area. The land was opened for settlement in the early 1900's. The homesteaders came largely from farming areas and so started farming here. They found a large variety of good grasses and other plants with abundant growth, especially in the low areas and they raised some good crops, particularly flax and wheat.

Then after twenty five years or so of farming, along came years of less than normal rainfall and above normal wind. Since many acres of the land was plowed and the virgin sod destroyed, both wind and water erosion began. The fields were bare and it was impossible to do anything to stop the erosion. Grass seedings were attempted, but with no results. Some small dams were built with horses, but were too small and not deep enough to carry water from one season to the next.

This continued for several years and the people became desperate and began to seek help to combat their problems, and contacted outside help in April 1937. With the help of the Faith Commercial Club, a meeting was called to survey the situation and try to find a solution. In attendance was 125 people—farmers, ranchers, businessmen, county commissioners, Extension and soil conservation people, railroad representative, and land development representatives. The discussion lead to soil conservation districts.

They set up an organization to carry on. The committee of Frank Gottschalk and Ed Hall, Perkins County; Frank Eichelman and Joe Heimer, Ziebach County and S. Tibble and C. E. Jonas from Meade County conducted nine more meetings in the three counties to explain and formulate plans. Jonas was chairman of this committee.

A hearing was held on July 15 at Dupree at 10 a.m., and at Faith at 2:30 p.m. Ben Strool presided at both hearing where 42 people spoke and presented evidence.

Since the evidence produced in the hearing was favorable, the State Committee approved the organization of the Conservation District, the election of supervisors and completion of the program. The date of the organization was October 15, 1937.

The original Conservation District covered 24 townships in Meade County, 14 in Ziebach, and 10 in Perkins County. In 1951 over 75,000 acres were added, and in 1954 another area was added along the west side of the Conservation District.

These men carried the load during the information and organization periods: Arthur Naslund, C. E. Jonas, Stokley Tibble, Frank Gottschalk, Ed Hall, Joe Heimer, Frank Eichelman, Maynard Jonas, Ben Henderson, Vernon Oliver, M. C. Corder, Nels Morrill, S. Tribble, C.J. Donneworth, W.L. Archer, Odin Thompson, and others.

The first Conservation District Supervisors were: C.E. Jonas, Stokley Tibble, Frank Gottschalk, Ed Hall and Joe Heimer.

Their problems were many; those most often stressed were:

- Too much land was left exposed to the ravages of nature;
- Wind and water erosion was severe;
- Range and pastures were over used and grass cover was reduced;
- The few stock water dams were too small;
- Timber along the creeks had been cut for fuel and fence posts.
- The people believed that a district could help them attack the problems by:
- Discouraging breaking out more grass;
- Developing a re-grassing program;
- Helping to borrow heavy equipment to build dams and dugouts, water spreading systems, and making fireguards. (The supervisors were able to borrow this equipment from the Soil Erosion Service.)

The Tri-County Conservation District was the pioneer conservation district in western South Dakota, and consequently was confronted not only with the problems of nature, but also with the human problems of resistance to change. But these leaders were pioneers, not only as early settlers, but as people who change their ways of living in western South Dakota.

Among others who have served as supervisors are: Louis S. Freiberg, Plainview; Darrell Giesler, Faith; J. Maynard Jonas, Faith; Milton Morrell, Fairpoint; and Walter Ingalls, Mud Butte.

The 1969 supervisors were: Darrell Giesler, Faith, Chairman; Walter Ingalls, Opal, Vice-Chairman; Margot Giesler, Faith, Secretary; Duane Thomas, Faith, Treasurer; Supervisors Victor Ellefson, Marcus; and Milton Morrell, Fairpoint.

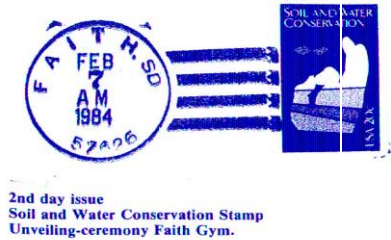
Updated information provided in 2012:

Excerpt from the *Faith Country Book 1960*, author unknown: "Without question, one of the most beneficial organizations within the community is the Soil Conservation District. In 1933-34, when our top soil was drifting in mounds over our fences, a group of farmers and ranchers realized the need for an organized effort to combat this wanton destruction of the land.

Today as you drive through the countryside, countless improvements are in evidence. There are acres of grassland, stock water dams to hold the water where it falls, beautiful shelter belts embracing many a farmstead. There is terracing, contour farming, and other devices which

protect our heritage.”

Excerpt from the *Faith Country Book 1985*, author Lavonne R. Butler: “Today, the Tri-County Conservation District no longer represents three counties. It now represents 10 townships in Perkins County and North Eastern Meade. Tri-County Conservation District received special recognition honoring the founder and promotion team of the Faith District on February 7, 1984. A Soil and Water Conservation stamp was unveiled here with dignitaries of the Postal Department, SCS, Senator James Abdnor’s office, Mayor Lavonne Butler and Postmaster Lois Bachman participating. The Faith School band played and presented colors.



The National Soil Conservation Service unveiled the stamp in Denver on February 6, 1984, and Faith February 7, 1984. This was only the fourth or fifth time in history a stamp was unveiled a second day.”

In recent years, many deep wells have been drilled and thousands of miles of pipeline have been laid in the district. Shelter belts are still being installed for livestock and homestead protection along with fabricated windbreaks. Dams, dugouts are still being used, no till and strip farming have been implemented, living windbreaks have been installed to protect the highways and county roads. Pasture rotation with cross fencing are also among practices being installed. Seventy-five years later, all the natural resources of the Conservation District are still being protected with practices installed now to protect the future.

**Past Supervisors:** Dennis Ellefson, Marlin Ingalls, Duane Keffeler, L.B. Birkeland, Wayne Doak, John Sletten and Larry Stomprud.

**Current Supervisors:** Harold Waterland, Rodney Giesler, David Fischbach, Irving Jordan and Barry Vig

**District Secretaries/ Managers:** Margot Giesler, Bill Hibner, Bette Ross, Jayne Jordan, Colleen Escott, LuAnn Outhier, Deb Wicks (current administrative secretary)

**USDA-NRCS District Conservationist assisting Tri-County Conservation District:** Verdette Thomas, Thomas Quinn, John Deppe, Mike Moorman, Tawn Nelson

**Other USDA-NRCS employees:** Ronald Moeliter, John Holt, Doug Talley, Chad Escott, Colleen Escott, Sunshine Gerbracht, Carrie Brakke, Lance Frei, Shannon McGinnis, John Beckettold, Rod Voss, Nathan Grueb, V.Dennis Ellefson, Derek Oliver.